

Israel's war of starvation

While Arafat charges collusion between Islamist and Jewish extremists, Israel turns its war against Hamas into a war of starvation against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, who, reports Tarek Hassan from the strip, are living their worst days since the 1967 June War

Clampdown

ISRAELI Prime Minister Shimon Peres confirmed yesterday that his government intended to deport several members of Hamas and Jihad, responsible for a series of recent suicide bomb attacks in Israel.

"This is not a wholesale deportation. We are not talking about the deportation of women, children, families or just anyone. We are deporting now for the sake of deterrence," Peres said.

Human rights groups have denounced the move, asserting that deporting Palestinians violated international agreements concerning people living under occupation.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat also called on Israel not to deport Palestinians in its first high-level meeting with an Israeli official since the recent wave of bombings. "I am against deporting any Palestinian from his homeland. If any Palestinian commits a crime, he should be punished and sent to prison in his homeland," Arafat said after talks with Israeli Environment Minister Yossi Sarid.

Yesterday, Israeli troops rounded up 35 suspected members of Hamas and Jihad in the northern West Bank. Israeli authorities have detained nearly 400 Palestinians since 25 February. Also yesterday, the Israeli army blew up the family home of a Hamas suicide bomber and said it planned to destroy another five homes in a refugee camp in the West Bank.

Chirac visit

FRENCH President Jacques Chirac is due to arrive in Cairo on 6 April on an official three-day visit, the French Elysee Presidency announced in a statement yesterday.

The Elysee statement said Chirac's visit to Egypt came upon an invitation from President Hosni Mubarak and will be part of a tour of the Middle East region which starts with Lebanon on 4 April.

Summit costs

OSAMA El-Baz, chief of the President's Bureau for Political Affairs, flatly denied allegations that secret agreements had been reached during the short closed session of the Sharm El-Sheikh's Peacemakers Summit last Wednesday. El-Baz, who was speaking to students of the Southern Valley University in Asswan on Tuesday, also denied reports that the summit had cost Egypt millions of pounds. Emphasising that the summit had been of "great benefit" to Egypt and the Arab countries, El-Baz said it had cost Egypt some LE117,787 (\$35,000).

Turabi MP

AT LEAST 12 Sudanese government ministers won seats in the new 400-seat parliament, according to partial results announced yesterday by the Sudanese electoral commission. Voting began on 6 March and ended on Sunday. Hassan Al-Turabi, leader of the National Islamic Front, won his first parliament seat, although he is widely considered to be the power behind the regime.

Many leading ministers took their seats by default because no candidate ran against them. The results of the presidential election were expected to be announced today.

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The Palestinians had been told that peace would usher in prosperity and that Gaza would become another Singapore or Hong Kong. But the situation in the blockaded strip has become catastrophic. Conditions are probably at their worst since 1967 and, in the view of many, even the days of the Israeli occupation were better.

As an "army" of 22,000 workers continues to remain idle, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat charged in an exclusive interview that ultra-rightwing Jewish extremists acted in collusion with the Islamist militants of Hamas and Jihad to wreck the peace process.

Arafat said that Palestinian security forces had seized missiles and explosives, which only exist in the Israeli arsenal, in the possession of the Islamist militants. He charged that "high and influential Israeli circles" provided Hamas and Jihad with this advanced weaponry. "It is regrettable that there is clear and documented collusion between the Israeli and Palestinian extremists," Arafat said.

But he indicated that the Islamist militants had the backing of Iran and unnamed Arab countries. Arafat said the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) had "asked" Iran, some Arab states and the other concerned parties to halt their support for the Palestinian Islamist organisations and their dangerous actions.

Sharm fall-out

INVITATIONS have been sent out to the 29 countries which took part in last week's Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit for a two-day follow-up conference that will open in Washington next Thursday, reports Hoda Tewfik from the US capital.

As in the Red Sea resort, differences are bound to emerge at the Washington meeting, with the Clinton administration placing the emphasis on the war against terrorism and the Arab side underlining the need for alleviating the sufferings of the Palestinians.

US Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross said, "The meeting will look to follow up on what's in the summit declaration, which has a number of specific items, in terms of what can be done to counter terrorism."

The American approach, as explained by Ross, is that the war on terrorism falls in three areas:

— The first is, through coordination and cooperation, what can be done to actually hit the capabilities of terrorist groups and to counteract them.

— The second is the question of what can be done to deal with the financing of these groups, identifying their sources and acting to cut them off.

— The third is to look at the kind of assistance, in the area of equipment or training, for those who are taking effective measures or seeking to take measures against terrorist groups.

"We'll be looking to see how we can follow up to act on those [points] and make them real and be able to report back in 30 days on the progress that we have made," Ross said. The American idea is to establish this working group as a standing mechanism. "It's going to have to be an ongoing, systematic effort because the nature of this challenge is itself one that is sufficiently complex that it requires a very determined effort on the part of many different countries," Ross added.

But Egypt, which co-sponsored the Sharm summit along with the United States, favours a more comprehensive approach. "The coming meeting in Washington of the working group is supposed to deal with all the aspects and all that was expressed in the co-chairmen's statement by Presidents Mubarak and Clinton," said Ahmed Maher, the Egyptian ambassador in Washington. The summit, he added, identified three fundamental objectives — to enhance the peace process, to promote security and to combat terrorism — and the follow-up meeting should focus on all of them.

"It is impossible that the follow-up to Sharm El-Sheikh singles out one objective, by focusing on the war against terrorism, and ignores the other objectives mentioned in the summit's final declaration," Maher said. He recalled that the participants stressed the need to reinforce the peace process and pointed out that "security needs are not only for one party... There are security needs for the Palestinians and much needed economic aid."



Mother's smile

Today is Egypt's Mother's Day but Fatma is not interested. What interest her is education for her children, she says, the only way to a better life. Of her toll she says little, but thanks to her efforts her five children are now in school.

photo: Randa Sheath

Mallawi's sigh of relief

Residents of Mallawi danced in the streets for joy after Interior Minister Hassan El-Ali announced that an 18-month night-time curfew would be lifted. Jallan Halawi saw it happen

Blowing whistles and beating drums, hundreds of young people roamed the streets of Mallawi, singing and dancing on Sunday night — the first time since October 1994 that they were allowed outdoors after 9 pm. Others swarmed sidewalk cafes, sipping tea or coffee and smoking waterpipes in celebration of Interior Minister Hassan El-Ali's announcement that a night-time curfew imposed on the town of 40,000 would be lifted.

Mallawi and a string of neighbouring villages in the Governorate of El-Minya have been the scene of a raging confrontation between security forces and Islamist militants for nearly two years. The cycle of violence and counter-violence forced many businesses to close down and whittled away at local residents' livelihood.

"But today, Mallawi's residents are elated because they can walk in the streets and smell some fresh air," said Mustafa Selim, an accountant. "I believe that lifting the curfew will have a positive effect on everybody after the sufferings of the past two years. We know quite well how to defend our newly-regained freedom."

El-Ali made the announcement at a meeting with local leaders Sunday morning, before making an unprecedented tour of the troubled town.

At the meeting's outset, Ashraf Ashour, head of the Mallawi city council, requested El-Ali to lift the curfew on the grounds that about 2,000 businesses went bankrupt in the once thriving city and many residents fled elsewhere to find work.

El-Ali responded: "The only reason I came here today was to listen to your demands and assure you that the police's main concern is citizens' security. If lifting the curfew is what you want, then you have it, but you should go on being cooperative with the police."

Emphasising this point, El-Ali said that without cooperation between local residents and the police, stability and security in their full sense cannot be achieved. "Our success in the last raids is the best proof of the importance and effectiveness of local cooperation with the police," he said. "The police cannot stop terrorism without the help of the people. I believe

that the past 18 months proved that fear and passiveness would have negative consequences."

But a group of seven villages around Mallawi will continue to snarl under the night-time closure. Over 350 policemen, militants and civilians have been killed in the Governorate of El-Minya, many of them in Mallawi and neighbouring villages, since the eruption of violence in the middle of 1994.

El-Ali's decision to lift the Mallawi curfew was obviously intended to display confidence that security forces have the upper hand. But it came less than 48 hours after unknown gunmen ambushed two senior police officers as they drove through the village of El-Baraghi, also in the Governorate of El-Minya. On Friday, Police Maj. Gen. Ahmed Abdel-Latif was wounded in the knee and his assistant, Brig. Gen. El-Sayed Mohamed Saleh, was shot in the stomach. The gunmen escaped.

Asked about the attack at a news conference, El-Ali said: "This does not signify an imbalance in the security situation. There is a handful of militants who are still at large, hiding in the sugar-cane fields."

El-Ali was greeted by thousands of people, shouting for joy, when he stepped outside the city council's building to begin his tour. Many in the crowd, who shouted praise for President Hosni Mubarak and El-Ali himself, could hardly catch a glimpse of the minister who was surrounded by a large number of security guards and officials as he strolled in the city's narrow streets.

"It was not an easy decision for El-Ali to risk his life by visiting Mallawi, which has been a hotbed of terrorism for a long time," a high security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "And yet he accepted the invitation of El-Minya governor, Maj. Gen. Mansour Esgawi, to visit the troubled town and listen directly to the requests of its residents. Once the date of the visit was set, security authorities worked around the clock to ensure that they were in firm control."

A massive security dragnet was mounted for the visit. Police armoured vehicles,

armed with machineguns, patrolled the highway connecting the city of El-Minya with Mallawi, while other vehicles were positioned in the streets leading to Mallawi's city council building. Police manned checkpoints at all entrances and exits of El-Minya Governorate.

School-children, waving pictures of President Mubarak, stood outside the city council in anticipation of El-Ali's arrival. Adults gathered behind dozens of metal barriers positioned on the streets leading to the city council.

El-Ali arrived by helicopter around 7:45 am and drove to the city council in a bullet-proof car, escorted by four bullet-proof jeeps. He was accompanied by Governor Esgawi and Maj. Gen. Sami Abdel-Gawad, El-Minya's security chief.

El-Ali told the local leaders: "Police are not here to have fun, but to die in order to protect you. Therefore, the least you can do is to provide every type of help to make their job easier."

In addition to demanding the lifting of the curfew, Ashour requested that a bridge be constructed to link the two banks of the River Nile at Mallawi. Others asked for the construction of a new railway station as well as pouring additional investments into the governorate.

El-Ali responded that developing Upper Egypt is a priority for President Mubarak, but added that "investment and development cannot be boosted except under secure and stable conditions. Therefore, the Ministry of the Interior is making tremendous efforts to provide suitable conditions for investment."

Before El-Ali's arrival and his decision to lift the curfew, citizens complained bitterly about their economic plight. "They cut off our livelihood," said Adila, who runs a small fast-food restaurant. "The curfew destroyed our income. We can hardly pay our taxes and insurance."

At first, she said, the residents of Mallawi did not pay much attention to the violence. "But as our conditions went from bad to worse, we could not sit back with folded arms and watch our children starve. We have no money and we are ready to do anything to live again peacefully." (see p.2)

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Grand Sheikh dies

The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mosque, Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq, died of a heart attack last Friday and was eulogised by President Hosni Mubarak. **Jamaal-ud-deen Musallam** writes an obituary

The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mosque, Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq — best remembered for his call to Islamicise modern times instead of modernising Islam — died early last Friday at his Cairo home of a heart attack. He was 79.

In a statement eulogising the departed religious leader, President Hosni Mubarak said, "Egypt and the Islamic nation have lost one of the greatest scholars of Al-Azhar... who honoured the trust and performed the vocation, adhering to God's religion and to Islamic Shari'a. He was never oblivious to any of God's rights or any of the obligations dictated by his responsibility... He preserved the credibility and sanctity of Al-Azhar as a forum of true religion."

Born in April 1917 in the village of Batra in the Nile Delta province of Daqaliya, Gad El-Haq joined Al-Azhar at an early age, learning the Holy Qur'an by heart and graduating from the Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence. After obtaining a diploma in personal status law, the sheikh rose to be a judge in the shari'a (Islamic) courts. He was elevated to Grand Mufti in 1978, minister of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments) in 1982 and Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar later in the same year.

The conservative religious leader opposed violence and defended the fundamentals of Islam, as laid down by the Qur'an and the sunna — the Prophet Mohamed's teachings. He was an opponent of secularism, advocating the view that Islam is both a religion and a government system. He derided philosophy as an intellectual extravagance that deflected many from "the right path." Sheikh Gad El-Haq also opposed the termination of the Arab boycott of Israel unless it withdrew from Jerusalem — site of Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine.

Unlike the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the departed sheikh viewed bank interest as sinful usury. At his directions, economic and banking experts held meetings with members of Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy to determine exactly the banking operations that violate Islamic teachings. These meetings came to the conclusion that interest deposits and interest loans were "sinful" but not banking services such as the transfer of assets.

Sheikh Gad El-Haq also took a headline position when the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo in 1994. He argued that sections of the conference's programme of action violated Islamic teachings — as well as the teachings of other monotheistic religions — and amounted to an abettment of immorality. The Egyptian delegation to the conference, as well as the delegations of other Islamic and Roman Catholic countries, took a similar position and insisted that modifications be introduced to the conference's programme of action.

One of Gad El-Haq's achievements was to establish tens of primary and secondary schools, run by Al-Azhar, across the nation and to encourage ordinary citizens to build similar schools. At the time of his death, the number of such institutes built in villages and towns by their own inhabitants had risen to 489 while the number of Al-Azhar University's faculties had been doubled to 56. The departed Al-Azhar sheikh also revived the practice that pupils at primary schools run by Al-Azhar should learn the Qur'an in its entirety by heart, not only as a religious education, but also to improve their Arabic language skills. He maintained the view that non-Azharite schools do not provide students with an acceptable level of religious education, insisting that this education should be part of the curricula, all the way up to university level.

Sheikh Gad El-Haq often complained that media programmes do not offer adequate space to religion and was critical of entertainment that did not offer a moral lesson.

The sheikh also increased the number of scholarships granted by Al-Azhar to foreign students and introduced vocational training programmes to equip preachers with crafts and skills that would provide them with a supplementary income.

Another of his important achievements was uniting various Islamic associations and bodies under the umbrella of the International Council for Dawaa (preaching) and Relief Aid, which he founded in 1988. The aim was to ensure that all Islamic states are dealt with on an equitable basis.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, representing President Mubarak, led the mourners at the grand sheikh's funeral which took place following last Friday's noon prayers. Several cabinet ministers as well as Muslim and Christian religious dignitaries marched in the funeral procession before the grand sheikh's body was transported to his home village for burial.

Foremost among Gad El-Haq's possible successors is El-Sadi Farhoud, a former president of Al-Azhar University, and currently a member of the Islamic Research Academy and the Education and Scientific Research Committee of the ruling National Democratic Party. Another candidate is Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University and chairman of the religious affairs committee of the People's Assembly. A third contender is Mohamed Metwalli Sharaawi, a preacher with great popularity and a former minister of Al-Awqaf.

Sharm El-Sheikh follow-up

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak rejected on Tuesday charges that Syria supports terrorism and affirmed that Damascus is working towards peace with Israel, reports Nerine Khalil. "We have no proof that Syria is participating in any kind of terrorism. Syria is looking for peace, even if, for the time being, there are a few problems," Mubarak said following talks with Turkish President Suleyman Demirel in Aswan.

Mubarak said the talks covered a follow-up conference to the Sharm El-Sheikh peace-makers summit which will be held in Washington towards the end of this month.

Demirel praised Mubarak's peace efforts and described last week's summit as successful, "very timely [and] a golden opportunity" for the peace process. The Turkish leader stated that the summit underlined "the solidarity of the international community against terrorism" in all its forms, and not only in Israel. The 29 leaders, including himself, who attended the summit, not only condemned terrorism but "decided that it should be followed up and upgraded".

Demirel denied that a dispute existed between Turkey and Syria over the latter's share of the Euphrates water. "For the time being, there is no dispute, there is no problem," he said.

The Turkish president ruled out a repeat of his country's intervention last year in northern Iraq. "But we have a terrorist problem [on the border] and we have to keep our land clean," he said.

Demirel and Mubarak agreed that Iraq's borders should remain unchanged.

Demirel described the talks with Mubarak as "very useful" and said they will result in a number of bilateral agreements soon. "We will increase our volume of trade, investment and cooperation," he said.

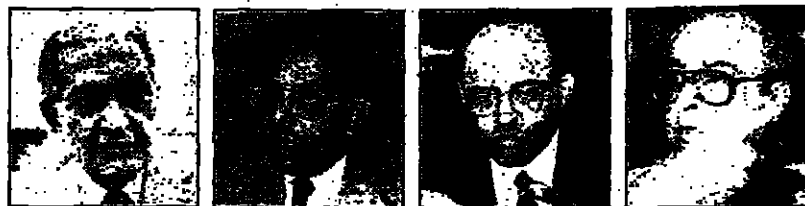
Demirel denied that military cooperation between Egypt, Turkey, Jordan and Israel was under consideration.

Mubarak, likewise, denied that regional military alliances were being considered and declared that efforts were focused on reviving the peace process.



Balancing Sharm El-Sheikh

Domestic reactions to last week's Peacemakers' Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh were varied. Islamists lambasted it, but most political forces and experts were gratified it had struck a proper balance between the requirements of peace and those of fighting terrorism, reports **Shaden Shehab**



Mustafa Khalil Moufid Shehab Mustafa El-Fiqi Adel Hussein

The general consensus in political circles is that the Peacemakers Summit held in the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh on 13 March was successful in that the 29 participants managed to place equal emphasis on the necessity of fighting terrorism and the need to reinforce the peace process.

The majority who praised the summit's outcome also said it served to affirm Egypt's role as the leading peace-broker in the region. The summit's critics, however, said it was an international demonstration of support for Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres as well as a condemnation of the suicide bombing attacks in Israel. These critics view the attacks as "the acts of freedom-fighters".

The four recent suicide bombings by Islamist militants killed 58 people in Israel in the space of 10 days. Israel retaliated by blockading the West Bank and Gaza and confining Palestinians to their villages and towns in the self-rule and Occupied Territories. The summit's final declaration listed its objectives as enhancing the Middle East peace process, promoting security in the region and defeating terrorism.

Mustafa Khalil, the former prime minister who helped negotiate the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, said the summit "succeeded in reviving the Middle East peace process and, at the same time, found ways of fighting terrorism." The summit struck a balance between the two.

Listing what he described as the summit's "many achievements", Khalil said one of them was to "disassociate Islam, or any other religion, from terrorism".

Moreover, Khalil added, "had the summit not been held, there would have been a united stand against [Palestinian President Yasser] Arafat, accusing him of not being able to run the self-rule territories although, in my opinion, Arafat is doing the utmost anyone in his position could do."

Khalil said the summit boosted Peres' standing by demonstrating the world's support for him while weakening the Likud Party's attempts to persuade the Israelis in an election year that security is more important than peace. "This will make it easier for Israeli voters to have a clearer vision," Khalil said.

Moufid Shehab, president of Cairo University and a member of the Shura Council, described the summit as a "historical event in international relations." He praised the summit's final declaration for not blaming terrorism on a specific party explicitly.

Shehab's assessment of the summit's outcome is that it "affirmed that terrorism is a global phenomenon and that all countries are committed to the Middle East peace process, security and combating terrorism." The summit also endorsed Egypt's leading role in the region, Shehab added.

Asked about charges the summit was mainly dedicated to serving Israel's interests, Shehab said that it "is not a crime for each country to have its own selfish motives. Israel and the United States wanted to dramatise support for Peres and guarantee Israel's security, while the Palestinians wanted to gain donations and assistance from other countries," he said.

Mustafa El-Fiqi, Egyptian ambassador to Austria

and former head of the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Institute, said the summit was significant because it affirmed the world's commitment to peace in the region. "It also showed that when peace is absent, terrorism will rear its ugly head. So peace is the only way of combating terrorism."

But El-Fiqi noted that it was "only when Israel's security was threatened, did the world remember to talk about peace and terrorism and a summit was quickly arranged. Israel was the greatest winner, but others had their gains as well," he said.

Egypt gained because holding the summit on its soil amounted to an admission that "this country is the key to peace and the key to war," El-Fiqi said. "The Palestinians gained financial support and economic aid and managed to project their viewpoint to the world that collective punishment is unfair and unacceptable."

Adel Hussein, secretary-general of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, disagreed, insisting that "Egypt, the Palestinians and the Arabs generally lost a great deal as a result of the summit and Israel was the sole winner."

Hussein said the summit "was not a conference in the true sense of the word. There was no agenda nor were there discussions. The main concern and focus, and the only reason behind the summit, was the condemnation of the Palestinian fedayeen [freedom-fighters] activities," he said.

What is even more sad, Hussein added, is that the Arabs joined this chorus of condemnation although, in his view, resistance to Israeli occupation and re-

pression is perfectly legitimate and justifiable. The choice of Egypt as the site of the summit "does not mean that the US is attaching special importance to it, but it is the only place where Arabs would be persuaded to go in order to support Israel," Hussein said.

The leftist Tagammu Party said in a statement that although it supported a just and comprehensive peace in the region and opposed terrorism, it viewed the summit as rendering a great service to Israeli-American policies. The statement noted that the Arab states made efforts to introduce modifications to the final declaration, placing an emphasis on the need to reinforce the peace process.

"Yet the summit's results show that it was an anti-terrorism conference that accepted the American position that acts of resistance against occupation are terrorism and that the Israeli bombing of south Lebanon, assassination and arrests of Palestinians and the demolition of houses are not terrorism," the statement added.

The summit provided Peres with Arab and international support — both crucial in light of the upcoming Israeli national elections, according to the statement. There was also agreement, the statement claimed, on setting up an Arab-Israeli-American security alliance, as part of a new Middle East order which Israel and America are attempting to impose on the region. This will mean action against the armed resistance to Israeli occupation as well as the states which America accuses of promoting terrorism, such as Syria and Libya, the statement added.

Nasserists in a generations' battle

Diaeddin Dawoud is facing a revolt in the ranks of his Nasserist party as the younger generation attempts to wrestle control from the party's old guard. **Amira Howeldy** investigates

A simmering power struggle inside the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party has exploded. The party's younger generation is attempting to overthrow the party's chairman, Diaeddin Dawoud, and wrest control. Five leaders of the rebellion fired the opening shot by submitting a series of demands at a meeting of the party's central committee held two weeks ago in Alexandria. Not only did Dawoud reject their demands, but he hit back by suspending them — all central committee members — for a year. The five dissenters are now calling for a general party congress to withdraw confidence from Dawoud.

The demands included the removal of Mahmoud El-Maraghi, chief editor of the party's mouthpiece *Al-Arabi*, on the grounds that the newspaper's circulation had dropped dramatically. The rebellion's leaders also demanded that the party's huge debts be accounted for and that the party's sub-committees be reorganised. An angry Dawoud rejected their demands, abruptly ended the meeting and left.

Led by Amin Iskandar, the five held their own separate meeting and issued a series of resolutions. Dawoud considered this a violation of party regulations and ordered their membership frozen on 8 March.

As a result, the five — Hamdin Sabahi, Ali Abdel-Hamid, Salah Dessougi and Shaikh El-Ghazal in addition to Iskandar — will be banned from party meetings and from participating in any party activity. *Al-Arabi* later published a statement by Dawoud saying that he had expected government-sponsored "conspiracies" following the recent parliamentary elections to "explode" opposition parties from the inside and tarnish their image. "What happened at the central committee meeting falls within this context," he said.

Since then, the two camps have been trading accusations and counter-accusations while attempting to mobilise supporters. Dawoud visited a large number of the party's provincial branches and even travelled south to Assiut, while his deputy, Hamed Mahmoud, travelled north to Tanta to meet with the party's members in the Nile Delta.

Iskandar's group, for its part, made use of the press by publishing extensive interviews, particularly in *Al-Ahram*, mouthpiece of the Liberal Party, lambasting Dawoud and his supporters.

"I know the situation has gone out of control," Hamed Mahmoud told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He said the problem was an old one "because Nasserists view political action from manifold perspectives." Basically, he added, there are two groups inside the party: those who were contemporaries of the late Pres-

ident Gamal Abdel-Nasser and a younger generation which was active in universities under Anwar El-Sadat in the 1970s.

"When the party was established, the generation, which upheld the banner of Nasserism while the old guard was in prison, thought that they were better qualified for leadership — but they repeatedly failed to gain control," Mahmoud said.

Claiming the rebellious five do not represent the majority, Mahmoud described their action as "factionalism. They want their people to control the party and its newspapers, but this is unrealistic," he said. Asked about their interviews with the press, Mahmoud said: "They can keep shouting and screaming but they are only condemning themselves."

Iskandar responded that Dawoud "comes from a different world. He thinks that just because he was a cabinet minister under Nasser, he has the right to force his views on the entire party."

Claiming that the younger generation is the majority, Iskandar added: "Dawoud knows this very well. This is why he did not put our demands to a vote at the central committee meeting."

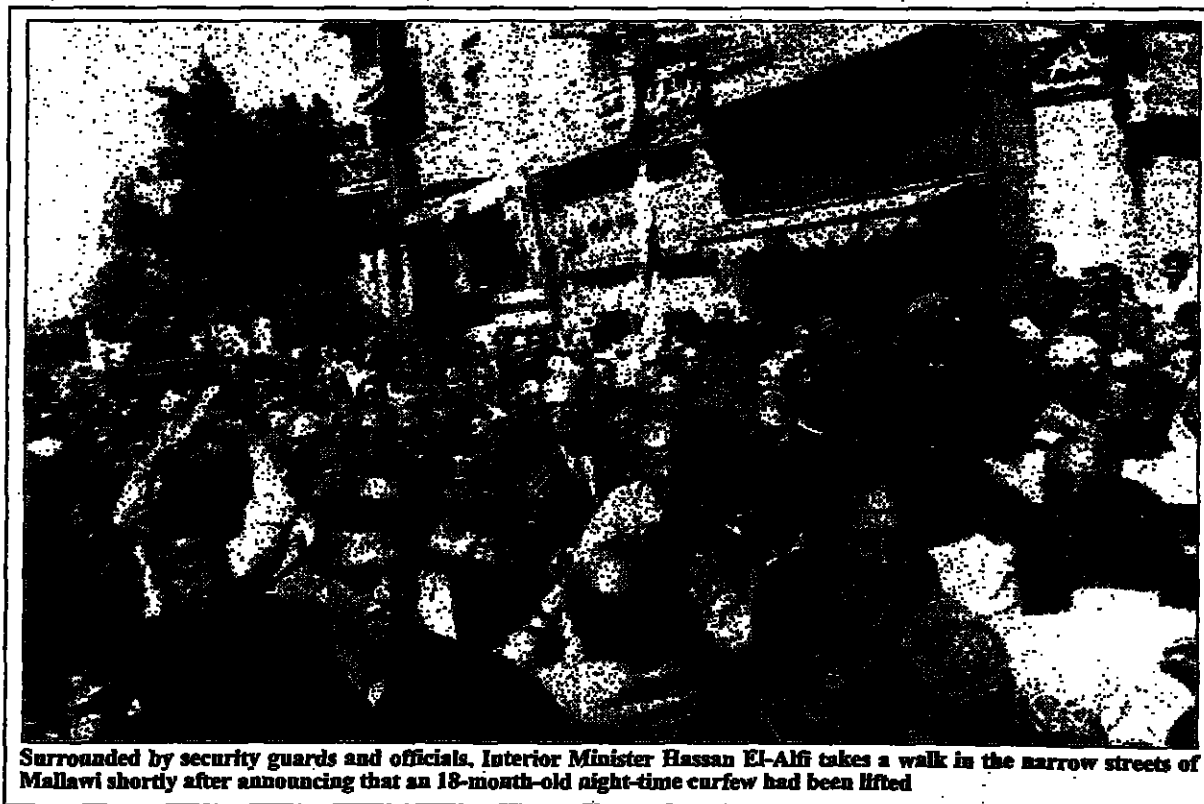
Iskandar said the old guard "is not fit for leading an opposition party. They still think they are cabinet ministers. If Sadat had tolerated them, they would have been his loyal servants. This is why we can never reach a mutual understanding."

Iskandar complained that the younger generation is marginalised and Dawoud monopolises decision-making. "The party is indebted to various people and we want to know why," he said. "The central committee appointed El-Maraghi as chief editor of *Al-Arabi* but does not have the power now to remove him because Dawoud does not want to."

Iskandar said his group had three choices: filing a lawsuit against Dawoud which could usher an endless legal battle, establishing a reconciliation committee or calling for an extraordinary general congress to withdraw confidence from Dawoud. "We decided on the third option and we will do it because we are the majority. Even if we fail, we will not leave the party but will fight for our rights," he said.

Dawoud would only say that "we'll wait and see," when asked about the call for an emergency party congress, but added that "we are not threatened by this bragging." He vowed that any rebels who join the "group of five" would face disciplinary action and he confidently ruled out the party's collapse.

"If they are as loyal as they claim to be, why are they tarnishing the image of our party? Why are they making scandals?" Dawoud asked.



Surrounded by security guards and officials, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi takes a walk in the narrow streets of Mallawi shortly after announcing that an 18-month-old night-time curfew had been lifted

Militants preempted in lower Egypt

Rounding up dozens of activists, security authorities say they have foiled plans by Islamist militants to stage subversive acts in Alexandria and the Nile Delta. **Rana Allam** reports

As the confrontation between police and Islamist militants continues in Upper Egypt, security authorities say they have foiled plans by Jihad and Al-Gama'a to revive their subversive activities in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria and the Nile Delta province of Sharqiya. Security sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that 32 members of Al-Gama'a were arrested in Alexandria while 41 members of Jihad and 33 members of Al-Gama'a were rounded up in Sharqiya.

The sources said the state security investigation department received information that Taha Abul-Abbas, an imprisoned militant, was attempting, from behind bars, to revive Al-Gama'a's activities in Alexandria and launch "terrorist" acts. He instructed two fellow militants, Ibrahim Mossa'd Abu Arab and Medhat Ahmed Abu Taha, to take

neighbourhood of Karmouz and attempted to raise financing by extortion and blackmail in similarly deprived areas.

The Al-Gama'a militants were arrested in synchronised police raids against their homes. Police also seized large amounts of the organisation's literature and cassette tapes.

The sources said the militants were not shifting their operations out of Upper Egypt but, by attempting to stage acts of subversion in Alexandria and the Nile Delta, sought to prove their presence.

The crackdown at the Sharqiya governorate, which extended over the past three weeks, began after police received information that a local Islamist lawyer, Al-Shahhat Sebha, was instructed by an Al-Balassi-based militant, Mohamed Abdel-Rahman El-Balassi, to revive Jihad's activities by recruiting new members. Telephone conversations between El-Balassi and Sebha were taped, indicating that important police personnel and buildings would be targeted.

El-Balassi, sentenced in absentia to 15 years imprisonment, was said to be acting in close collaboration with another militant, Ahmed Mahmoud Rabi, who, according to the sources, ran a paramilitary training camp for terrorists in Albania. The two were said to be in touch with three other expatriate militants — Sarwat Shehata, sentenced to death for the 1994 attempt on then Prime Minister Ataf Sidki's life, Adel Mohamed Abdel-Meguid and Hani Youssef Al-Sebai. The whereabouts of the three were not disclosed.

During the police interrogation, Sebha reportedly admitted that he was leader of the local Sharqiya chapter of Jihad and was under instructions to revive its activities, including attacks on Christians. Public sources say he also confessed that he had received the sum of LE60,000 with which he bought a piece of land for the purpose of building a house to provide shelter for escaped militants.

Other detained militants are said to have admitted that they were in the process of training and were under instructions to keep a watchful eye on police movements. The security sources said their aim was to catch the militants before they go into action. "Act and not react is our plan," a source said.

More strikes

SECURITY forces have arrested 13 escaped members of Al-Gama'a in Alexandria and Jihad at their hideouts in Cairo and the governorates of Giza, Beni Suef, Sharqiya, Gharbiya, Sohag, Damietta and Port Said, an interior ministry statement said Tuesday.

The arrests included three militants who attempted to enter the country by using forged papers, the statement said but did not disclose where they were picked up. Some of those arrested were wanted by police in connection with attacks on security personnel, video shops in Cairo and a mosque in Suez City.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Washington wants Syria to crack down on Hezbollah; it also wants it to make peace with Israel. Zeina Khodr explores the ramifications of the American strategy

War on Hezbollah



For the moment Israeli soldiers are simply patrolling the border between Israel and south Lebanon. But villagers in south Lebanon are waiting in fear of an attack following comments by the coordinator of Israeli affairs in Lebanon, Uri Lubrani, that Israel would break its 1993 pledge to halt bombings against civilian areas if Hezbollah does not stop its attacks against Israeli forces (photo:AFP)

In a hastily organised one-day summit sponsored by the United States and Egypt in Sharm El-Sheikh last week, 29 world leaders promised global action to destroy the infrastructure of what they consider terrorist organisations and save the Middle East peace process.

Lebanon along with its close ally Syria boycotted the summit, saying it was aimed at helping Israel and damaging Arab interests, and protesting that it made no distinction between terrorism and the right to resist foreign occupation.

Analysts here say that the main decision at the summit was to ostracise Iran, accused by the US and Israel of sponsoring violence. Tehran is a major financial supporter of Hezbollah in south Lebanon, Israel, and for the first time, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat accused Iran of responsibility for the wave of suicide bombings in Israel, which were claimed by Hamas. "Iran ordered the latest attacks," Arafat said. He also said that some Arab states, which he did not identify, had an interest in the attacks.

Under pressure from the US and Israel, Arafat has cracked down on Hamas and taken tougher measures against its members operating from areas under his control in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Israel, which has already detained hundreds of Hamas activists, demolished homes and

sealed off Palestinian areas, has launched an international campaign to dry up funding for Hamas.

Analysts added that similar pressure is expected to be exerted on Syria because it hosts several radical Palestinian guerrilla groups that oppose the PLO-Israeli peace agreements and it continues to allow Hezbollah to operate in south Lebanon. Syria is the main power broker in Lebanon with 35,000 troops in the country.

The US and Israel say Hezbollah, whose gunmen are spearheading a guerrilla war to oust Israeli troops from the buffer strip it occupies in south Lebanon, is a terrorist group. Beirut and Damascus consider Hezbollah's operations as patriotic resistance against the Israeli occupation. The resistance attacks also have another function. They serve as a means for Syria to maintain pressure on Israel during peace negotiations between the long-time enemies.

Syria, Israel believes, could deal a blow to Hamas, Hezbollah and other groups opposed to the Israel-PLO peace deals, but Damascus has resisted US and Israeli pressure to curb the activities of the Damascus-based groups.

Washington continues to have both Syria and Iran on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. But while Syria has joined the US-sponsored Middle East peace process, Iran is

strongly opposed. Consequently, Washington cannot isolate Syria the same way as Iran because Damascus is heavily involved in the peace process, one analyst commented. "But Damascus will be pressured since it supports groups which the US wants to crush. Also, Syria will be pressured because a significant number of Arab countries attended the summit which showed that the process of normalising relations with Israel is moving ahead and Damascus is being left behind. It is losing one of its bargaining cards."

"Isolating Iran will not destroy Hamas, but it may affect funding for Hezbollah," an Islamic writer who preferred to remain anonymous told Al-Ahram Weekly. "Accusations that Iran is supporting Hamas are false. Hamas does not receive orders from outside. It does not have any strong representation in other Arab countries. It may have offices in Syria and Iran, but they have refrained from establishing permanent cadres among the Palestinian diaspora. In Lebanon, Hamas has been discreet. Its representative Mustafa Liddawi was deported by Israel in 1991 and he now runs an information office in one of the Palestinian camps. But the group's activities in Lebanon are limited to information and establishing contacts with other Islamic groups."

The writer added that it will be difficult to cut

off all aid to Hamas since many social and humanitarian institutions discreetly grant it funds.

Lebanon and Syria are now expected to face increased pressure to silence Hezbollah and other Palestinian groups. Israel has been threatening to increase its military activities in the south and breach an understanding reached in July 1993 between the US, Syria and Iran to put an end to the Israeli onslaught against the region. "If Hezbollah continues to escalate the situation in the south, Israel will retaliate," Uri Lubrani, the so-called coordinator for Israeli activities in Lebanon, said. The agreement stipulates that Israel will refrain from hitting civilian targets in south Lebanon and Hezbollah will not launch Karyusha attacks on northern Israel.

Israel has also conditioned the resumption of peace talks with Syria on Damascus' response to a US demand to take a tougher line on "terrorism". But Hamas and Hezbollah have vowed to step up their struggle against occupation, despite the US and Israeli demands to contain this violence.

The chances of Washington achieving this are, however, unlikely to improve because of a one-day meeting in a seaside resort. Until the political roots of the conflict are dealt with, this cycle of terror is likely to continue.

The US campaign against Iran had been criticised by observers as a double-edged sword. Rasha Saad gauges reactions

Targeting Tehran

In last week's Summit of the Peacemakers, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres labelled Tehran as the capital of terror, on the grounds that its regime "initiates, promotes and exports violence and fanaticism". Tehran has been charged with involvement in the latest series of bombings carried out in Israel by Hamas militants.

Though Iran did not attend the summit at Sharm El-Sheikh, denouncing it as a "helpless show... by the US", President Rafsanjani denied any direct financial or armed support to militant Islamic groups, particularly Hamas and Islamic Jihad. However, Rafsanjani approved of the struggle against occupation. "We will never condemn the fight of the Palestinian people, but we never support or approve of violent actions."

Many Arab observers are likely to accept Rafsanjani's words. For them there is no concrete evidence of such direct involvement. Although it is believed that funds from Tehran reach, via third parties, bank accounts to which Hamas and Islamic Jihad have access, reports show that money is also sent to Hamas from certain Western as well as other Arab countries.

According to Mohamed El-Said Abdel-Mu'min, head of the Persian department at Ain Shams University, funds from Iran to Palestinian groups are usually channelled through Iranian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which the government has little control over. He also said that these NGOs do not interfere in the policy of the recipients. "The Iranian government

avoids direct involvement in these issues, even the pro-Iranian Hezbollah is financed through the NGOs. The government only uses them as a pressure card to achieve its interests," added Abdel-Mu'min.

Assaf Bayiat, an Iranian sociologist at the American University in Cairo, said that the problem between Israel and the Palestinian groups emerges from the nature of the peace process itself rather than any Iranian interference. "I do not think that Iran has that kind of power — to stop or slow down the peace process. Of course Iran would be very happy to see that the process does not work, but they are not the major factor in this."

Peres' words echoed the US campaign against Iran as a country which sponsors terrorism. Critics of US policy in the region argue that Washington's aim is to contain radical states in the Middle East as a means of pushing forward the Arab-Israeli peace process and maintaining Western access to Gulf oil. As part of this scenario, the US has sought to portray Iran as the major threat to security in the Gulf area.

The US has accused Iran of being behind unrest in Bahrain and Qatar. It has also said that Iran is fortifying its positions in the Gulf waters. Washington has depicted Iran, with its backing of Hezbollah and its attempts to achieve nuclear capability, as one of the major obstacles to reshaping the Middle East.

Since the beginning of 1995 the US has pur-

sued concrete measures to put pressure on Iran's already crippled economy. President Clinton banned all US trade with the Islamic Republic and has threatened to apply sanctions on foreign companies which invest in Iran. The US also announced that it will allocate \$20 million for an anti-Iranian programme, and pressure the European Union (EU) to get tougher with Iran and consider breaking off links unless the Tehran government adopts a firmer stand on terrorism.

However, the US anti-Iranian campaign has been criticised by American as well as Arab observers as exaggerated. To them the US measures against Tehran help portray Iran as a victim of US aggression, rather than as a country which supports terrorism.

Bayiat believes that the US campaign will not work. "The US pressure on the Iranian regime will backfire. The Iranian government is quite able to utilise such measures to externalise internal problems."

Bayiat also pinpointed the campaign as a device which enables the government to maintain a firm hold over the Iranian population. "Whenever a country is under an economic or political attack, governments are able to keep more control of the population and restrict cultural and intellectual activities."

Observers also drew a comparison between the approach of the US and the EU to the Iranian issue. According to one American analyst, the EU has achieved more from Iran than the US. He at-

tributed the US's shortcomings to the difference in the targets of both parties. The US, he claims, is not dealing with Iran as a separate country, but as a ring in a chain that will lead to their goal of a new Middle East.

Bayiat agrees that the EU "better understands what is going on in Iran than the Americans do". He believes that the EU's policy of "critical dialogue" is more effective. Bayiat cites the example of France and Germany who were "somehow able to convince the regime not to carry out the *fatwa* against Iranian writer Salman Rushdie" — whose killing was sanctioned by Iran for allegedly insulting Islam in his novel, *The Satanic Verses*.

US measures against Iran have been understood as part of the "dual containment" policy which the US has also applied against Iraq. However, according to Abdel-Mu'min, there is a big difference between Iraqi and Iranian thinking. "Iran adopts a long-term planning strategy and is not going to risk its strength in one move [as Iraq did when it invaded Kuwait]. Rather, it depends on a well-planned ideological strategy and the movement of its people [across the region] to control the Gulf area," he said.

Abdel-Mu'min explained that Iran with its large population — according to official reports, 63 million but some believe it to be higher — is able to "invade" the Gulf countries by means of its human resources. Iraq, on the other hand, has only a population of 18 million.

Different strokes in the Gulf

Are there cracks in the collective approach of the Gulf states to Israel, asks Hassan Abu Taleb

The Arab Gulf states responded quickly and unreservedly to the invitation to attend the peacemakers' summit at Sharm El-Sheikh last week. Though none of the Gulf states were represented by a head of state, Bahrain sent its highest dignitary, Sheikh Hamad Bin Issa Al-Khalifa, heir to the throne. The ranks of the other Gulf delegates varied considerably. Oman sent the special representative of Sultan Qaboos; Qatar and Kuwait sent their deputy prime ministers; and Saudi Arabia and the Emirates both sent their foreign ministers.

The participation of the Gulf states was based on a collective three-point stand. First, support of the peace process and the ongoing negotiations for a political settlement. This is based on a conviction that it is a strategic prerequisite for stability in the region and recognition of Arab rights. The second is a rejection of violence and terrorism as a means of achieving political objectives. And third, promoting regional stability and backing efforts to create a new order that would govern regional interactions and discourage war and military activities.

The overriding theme in the speeches of the Gulf delegates was the condemnation of terrorism, an international phenomenon affecting many countries these days. All Gulf delegates emphasised the need to disassociate Islam from terrorism and to bolster the peace process, including giving support to the parties directly involved in the process.

However, the speech delivered by the Qatari speaker at the summit had a distinctive quality. In an unprecedented move, Qatar's Interior Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa officially invited Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to visit the Gulf state whenever it suits him.

The invitation underscores Qatar's new polit-

ical direction under its leader, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad, who came to power last June after toppling his father. Qatar's current stand is based on establishing direct economic relations with Israel. Qatar has spearheaded the move towards economic normalisation with Israel, particularly in connection with the sale of natural gas, establishing a two-way air route with Israel, and exchanging liaison offices as a possible prelude to full diplomatic relations.

Other Gulf states have expressed reservations regarding these issues and consider that normalisation and economic cooperation with Israel should follow rather than precede comprehensive peace in the region. They believe that giving the peace process a boost is not the same as normalising relations with Israel. They cite the incomplete settlement on the Palestinian track as one of the reasons for their reservations towards Israel.

They also note that progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks has not yet been made, the Jerusalem issue is no nearer to being solved and many Arab and Islamic rights remain unrecognised. They are of the belief that greater normalisation with Israel under these circumstances will weaken the Syrian and Lebanese negotiating positions and favour Israel.

For its part, Saudi Arabia's position was clearly spelt out at the summit. This stand rests on four main premises. The first is to reinforce a commitment to peace at this crucial and tense period. The second is a condemnation of aggression carried out by all parties, from the Hebron Mosque massacre to the recent suicide bombings in Israel. The Saudi foreign minister said that these attacks can only be confronted successfully if the peace process is redirected to achieve its primary objective — a comprehensive and just peace in line with UN Se-

curity Council resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this regard, progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and a climate conducive to the conclusion of the final stage of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations are prerequisites to comprehensive peace in the region.

Third, imposing collective punishment that penalises innocent civilians and turns them into victims must be avoided if terrorism is to be effectively defeated. This was an apparent criticism of the measures adopted by the Israeli government against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Saudi position is based on a conviction that collective punishment provides fertile ground for terrorism.

The Saudi foreign minister also seconded Syria's call for a second round of Madrid peace talks to bolster the peace process. It seems, therefore, that the foreign minister's speech amounted to a rejection of the US-Israeli joint position equating Syria with Iran as a sponsor of terrorism in the region.

That is not to say that the six Gulf states are soft on terrorism. They strongly reject militancy and have denounced violence and aggression as political tactics. But in renouncing violence, the Gulf states note its different origins. They make a distinction between Israel's acts of violence towards Palestinians and the violent tactics to which certain Palestinian groups resort in opposing Israeli occupation.

They consider that the aggression exhibited by some Palestinian groups is an outcome of the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians and that the answer lies in tackling the roots of this injustice, with Israel abiding by its commitments to the Palestinians.

Recent experience in the Gulf has strengthened the Gulf states' opposition to violence. For

instance, there was the unprecedented bombing of a building housing an American military group that had come to train the Saudi national guard in November of last year. It revealed the hostility of certain opposition groups to the regime and its cooperation with the US and the West in general.

This growing militancy is not confined to Saudi Arabia. It has spread gradually to the point where it threatens to engulf the whole region. The latest wave of violence has swept over Bahrain. And even though it is essentially due to internal reasons, an official Bahraini investigation found that foreign hands are also behind the unrest. Iran was said to be implicated in stirring up the Shi'ite population in Bahrain against the Sunni ruling regime. There have also been reports of the existence of certain extremist religious groups in Oman.

Such developments have given rise to an urgent need to combat terrorism and extremism on an internal and regional scale. Hence, the particular importance of the Sharm El-Sheikh summit to the Gulf states. American and Israeli statements prior to and during the summit attempted to put Iran in the dock. Their comments are part of a campaign to isolate Iran, regionally and internationally, particularly after the recent wave of suicide bombings in Israel.

However, there are geopolitical considerations that make it difficult for the Arab Gulf states to completely isolate Iran. It is a neighbouring country and it has demographic and religious links with them all. Nevertheless, the Arab Gulf states, with the exception of Qatar which has closer links with Iran than its Gulf counterparts, have criticised Iran's actions. At the same time, the Gulf states do not wish to isolate Iran completely and would prefer to keep channels open for relations to improve in the future.

The devil and the deep blue sea

By Eqbal Ahmad

February 27 was its fifth anniversary. In a speech that was a lasting monument to delusion, Saddam Hussein welcomed the start of the Gulf War as the "mother of all battles". Iraq's army engaged for a hundred hours the military coalition led by the United States, and pulled from the jaws of Desert Storm the mother of all defeats. Fifty thousand Iraqi soldiers were killed, nearly all of them fleeing rather than fighting. What did the losers and winners get out of this war?

Nothing survives of pre-war Iraq except Saddam Hussein and his coercive state machine. Its people suffer to this day from the cruel embargo which the great powers have imposed on that country. International relief agencies periodically issue heart-rending reports on how this once prosperous people is suffering from want in a devastated yet militarised economy. Children die of malnutrition, and hospitals are without medicines. The US will not lift the embargo until Iraq meets all its demands to dismantle presumed military capabilities. To Saddam Hussein, power and symbols of power are more important than the lives and welfare of Iraq's people who are caught between the devil of a tyrant and the deep blue sea of imperialism.

Saddam Hussein has obviously failed to comprehend the simplest lesson of the Gulf War: that weapons are important to warfare but do not make the difference between victory and defeat, not even between a good fight and abject surrender. In war, as in diplomacy, the decisive factors are the morale of officers and men, organisation and speed, knowledge and training, and strategic planning which demands comprehensive knowledge of the adversary, superior intelligence of his objectives and resources; above all, a cold estimation of one's own strengths and weaknesses. When he invaded Kuwait, Saddam Hussein commanded the world's "fourth largest" military force — as the United States' officials and their Pavlovian media chimed repeatedly during the months of build-up toward the war — which lacked every attribute of a fighting force except plentiful and expensive arms.

Iraq's government had ample opportunities to comprehend and internalise these fundamental requirements of warfare. Samples had been served up to it on a platter. The numerically superior Arabs did not learn from their defeat by Zionist forces in 1948. That, in effect, was the "baby of all retreats". Then they grossly misconstrued the lessons of the Suez war of 1956, and became obsessed with arms while giving only symbolic attention to the other more crucial elements. (In 1963, Egypt's General Nasser was outraged when I ventured a youthful observation to this effect). The debacle of the War of 1967 should have served as the final, unforgettable lesson. Not long thereafter, a well-regarded army effected an abject surrender in East Pakistan, another event replete with lessons. In 1973 the Egyptian and Syrian armies gave some evidence of learning from their own and other people's defeats. The failures from which Egypt greatly suffered were actually more political than military in nature, which again underscored the close links between politics and warfare. Then there was the protracted war between Iraq and Iran, replete with insights into the deficiencies of Iraq's army. All these lessons were lost on the Takritis in Baghdad.

Before, after and during the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein's government evinced total disregard of all that history teaches about diplomacy and war. It was as though they had descended from Mars and knew nothing of the time and ways of the earth and its grandees. He invaded Kuwait as though he had no inkling of US policy objectives in the Middle East. Where a super-power had been knocking about for one-and-a-half decades, he opened the gates at the moment when America's adversary was re-creating and its aim was high. During the months when George Bush methodically mobilised an international coalition behind his powerful intervention, Saddam Hussein lost one opportunity after another to pull his troops out of Kuwait and leave the United States in a state of consummate and unrequited readiness.

He conducted pre-war diplomacy as though it were a Masonic ritual, giving out conflicting signals, all secret. He held hundreds of Americans hostages, then released them without negotiating. All along, he abused Kuwait. His soldiers brutalised Kuwaitis without incurring punishments. Who does not know that an unsoldierly conduct does not boost morale? Today, I remain haunted by images of those wretched men, dead-in-flight on the "highway of death", clinging to stolen trinkets and toys; broken pieces of television, radio and clocks strewn with their torn, wasted remnants of life. No less than 50,000 of them perished; four times more were crippled. The lucky ones were able to surrender. They did it in hordes. Twenty thousand Iraqi soldiers surrendered before the land war began. As the land war started, surrender became epidemic. "It is a war of accommodating prisoners," an American officer informed his TV audience. An occasional fire fight notwithstanding, it was a massacre, not a war. "We had expected 25-30 per cent casualties," said an American general. Less than one per cent, 146 American and 246 coalition soldiers were killed, mostly from friendly fire.

General Colin Powell was concerned that more killing would sully his army's reputation, and told the president that "to continue this massacre would be uncharacteristic, un-American". George Bush approved the cease-fire on 27 February. His aides reported that Saddam Hussein was joyous at the news, and exclaimed: "We won. We won." Bush came on television and made his "Kuwait is liberated" speech. Kuwaitis celebrated by shooting in the air. Soon thereafter, they were indiscriminately persecuting Palestinian families resident in Kuwait. There were popular uprisings in the predominantly Shi'ite south and the Kurdish-dominated north of Iraq which Saddam Hussein's army was brutal in suppressing. It massacred people, burnt homes, and destroyed towns, including the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. In broadcasts beamed to Iraq, Bush called upon Iraq's inhabitants to rise against Saddam. American soldiers watched the horror with shame and amazement. But they had their president's orders not to intervene.

The "mother of all retreats" was a war of reminders and revelations. It reminded that Third World armies are better at brutalising citizens than at defending countries. It revealed Arab and Muslim leaders in the fullness of their mental frailty, moral bankruptcy, inhumanity, and absence of vision. They were unable or unwilling to solve, in a vast and strategic region, an internal crisis created by ruthless and a stupid dictator. The material cost of his folly and their failure is estimated at \$650 billion. The human toll is still exacting, and awaits estimation. The moral costs may be incalculable. We must examine the meaning of this disaster if we are to arrest our civilisational free fall.

It revealed again the mask of imperialism. The United States did better than Arabs did. Others paid the bill of America's greatest post-cold war adventure. George Bush inaugurated a "new world order". Arabism was finally contained, and the long held US objective of attaining paramountcy in the Middle East appeared achieved. There was a cost-effective exhibition of American weapons, which enhanced our cravings for them, stimulated sales, and also created new buyers in the Gulf. There were dividends of peace. These included large commercial contracts for cleaning up the oil wells which Saddam's forces had thoughtfully put to the torch, and for the reconstruction of Kuwait. The PLO, smarting from its leader's failure to support the US-led coalition, became unusually amenable to signing a loser's peace. Israel emerged as not only the most powerful but also a nearly legitimate Middle Eastern state recognised by all but a few Arab states.

These gains may be more ephemeral, however, than meets the eye. America was already the dominant power in the Middle East and would be an unchallenged one after the demise of USSR. Desert Storm was more a case then of delayed "grande entree", one that carries the burden of embittering a sizable number of Arabs. Moreover, in a culture which had developed over centuries a dialectical relationship between contrasting pulls of particularist and universalist forces, the defeat of Arabism may not be an unmitigated blessing for America. Islamism would seek to fill the void left by the decline of Arabism's universalist appeal. Not unexpectedly, Islamist movements gained new ground in Algeria and Egypt after the Gulf War. Iran, a "rogue state" in the American political dictionary, is more secure now and a little more influential than it was before the Gulf War.

As for Oslo I and II, they have not yielded the Palestinians the sovereignty and land to which they have aspired since their dispossession. Nor have they given Israelis the sense of security they seek. To both peoples, the Oslo agreements are likely to bequeath a state of apathy which, over time, may beget much bloodshed between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.

Egypt's ailing cinema industry requires a boost, a parliamentary committee was told this week. Meanwhile, the depositors of the defunct money investment companies have received yet another blow, this time as a side effect of the government's privatisation programme, another committee heard. Gamal Essam El-Din reports on the two parliamentary debates

Saving Egyptian cinema

Two public sector companies were recently the focus of a heated debate at a session of the People's Assembly's Cultural and Tourism Committee. The two companies, Misr Company for Studios and Film Production (MCSFP) and Misr Company for Sound and Light (MCSL), were adversely affected by the impact of government-imposed anti-inflationary measures covering the cinema industry, coupled with a decline in Arab tourists as a result of extremist violence in Upper Egypt over the past few years.

According to a report submitted to the Assembly by the Central Auditing Agency (CAA), MCSFP was hard hit by widespread piracy of Egyptian films in Arab countries, the United States and Canada, as well as the growing number of TV satellite channels. As a result, the report added, MCSFP's production over the past two years fell short of its target by LE2.183 million or 19.7 per cent. The CAA report also attributed this decline to a LE1.242 million drop in sound service revenues and a LE862,000 decline in the sale of raw materials. The situation was compounded by the failure to produce four documentary films worth around LE300,000.

In addition, according to Farouk Shalabi, MCSFP's chairman, "The company is supposed to be operating on a profit basis in line with the new Public Sector Law no. 203. But since MCSFP is under the jurisdiction of the Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema, it still acts as a service company because all of its assets are still officially owned by the Ministry of Culture." As a result, Shalabi ex-

plained, MCSFP is still unable to exploit resources for its own profit or get any financial assistance from the Holding Company. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture contends that privatising the company is bound to affect its cultural responsibilities. Currently, MCSFP has three film studios, a film developing laboratory, a sound centre, a film editing centre as well as Cinema City studios.

Shalabi noted that over the last few years video production has expanded rapidly and, as a result, most films are now recorded in apartments and villas instead of MCSFP's studios. According to the CAA report, video operations increased to 92.5 per cent of the company's total operations in 1993/94 compared with 82.9 per cent and 81.6 per cent in 1992/93 and 1991/92 respectively. In contrast, MCSFP's film production dropped from 96 films in 1992/93, to a mere five in 1995/96, noted Shalabi.

In the same vein, the CAA report noted that MCSFP's production costs rose from LE6.315 million in 1992/93 to LE6.859 million in 1993/94. Shalabi maintained that in the forties and fifties, when Egypt produced 100 to 150 films annually, the country earned greater revenues from films than from cotton production.

According to Shalabi, MCSFP was dealt another blow, this time by the Ministry of Information. "The ministry is planning to establish a cinema centre in the Sixth of October's new Media City at an estimated cost of LE11 million," said Shalabi. He warned that this new centre will eventually destroy the company.

Shalabi said that MCSFP has adopted various measures to survive in an increasingly competitive environment. For

instance, a US grant of LE3 million assisted the company in upgrading its sound services and training its employees in new production areas, particularly video production. He added that the company has cut its appointed staff by 2.7 per cent and seasonal employees by 16.2 per cent. These steps resulted in higher production levels which, in turn, increased revenues by 16 per cent.

Doreya Sharafeddin, the committee's consultant and a member of MCSFP's board, believes that the company's dilemma stems from its focus on the Arab Gulf market. "The company was forced to mainly cater to the tastes of the Arab market," said Sharafeddin. At the time when the Gulf War broke out, Egyptian films were generating around \$40,000 in Saudi Arabia and \$10,000 per year in Kuwait.

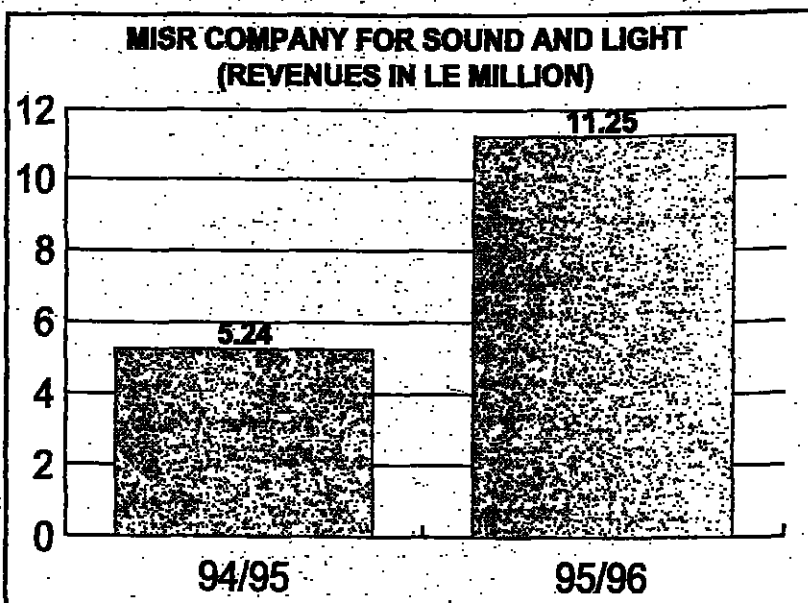
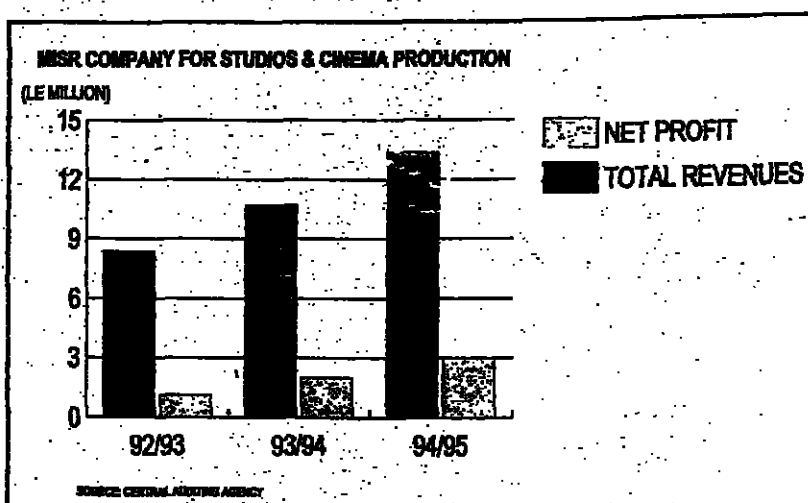
Salah El-Tarazi, chairman of the Assembly's Cultural and Tourism Committee, suggested merging MCSFP with Misr Film Distribution and Movies Company (MFDMC), since, in his view, production and distribution are two sides of the same coin. However, Sharafeddin rejected this suggestion. She argued that MFDMC is also suffering from financial problems "and adding one weakness to another means double weakness." She said that MFDMC's dilemma was "largely due to a decrease in the number of cinema houses in Egypt. When Egypt's population was 20 million there were 450 movie theatres; now Egypt's population is around 60 million while there are only 120 movie theatres, half of which are below acceptable standards." Sharafeddin sees the solution in upgrading movie theatres and building new ones, as well as focusing on the Egyptian market.

El-Tarazi said that the committee intends to submit a report to the Assembly on possible reforms. He proposed that MCSFP venture into new and more lucrative activities such as advertising. He also suggested that talks with the Ministry of Information may put off the construction of a new cinema centre.

Discussions regarding Misr Company for Sound and Light revealed that the company was affected by the negative impact of the Gulf War and militant attacks in Upper Egypt, which resulted in a decrease in the number of Arab tourists visiting Egypt. The CAA report confirmed that MCSL's projected revenues dropped from LE22 million in 1992 to LE7 million in 1994.

However, the company's chairman, Sayed Hassaballah, said that MCSL managed to absorb new cash and make a modest profit under the jurisdiction of the Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema. Hassaballah also noted that the company was able to replace and renovate its sound and light equipment at a cost of LE58 million over the last three years. MCSL now displays films with subtitles in up to seven languages. As a result, the company's revenue rose to LE11 million from July 1995 to February 1996, according to Hassaballah.

El-Tarazi, the committee's chairman, agreed with many members that MCSL is a valuable national asset and hence must not be privatised. However, various members also supported Hassaballah's proposal to offer 10 per cent of the company's shares for public subscription. Hassaballah also recommended that five per cent of the shares be sold to the company's employees.



MIC depositors receive another blow

At a time when the government is selling a large number of public sector companies, the newly-appointed Socialist prosecutor-general, Gaber Riham, announced last week before the People's Assembly's Legislative and Constitutional Committee that he is facing difficulties in selling an estimated LE136 million in assets of a number of the defunct money investment companies (MICs).

These companies, which were established in the mid-eighties to channel savings into investment projects, failed to repay depositors when the government instructed them to restructure their financial systems.

Consequently, the Socialist pro-

secutor-general and the prosecutor-general were entrusted with the task of selling these companies' assets in an attempt to repay depositors. Riham said his office has so far managed to sell 28 out of a total of 38 companies.

Riham recently submitted three alternative proposals to the government in an attempt to find a lasting solution to the MICs' dilemma and to alleviate depositors' fears. The first option, he said, is to persuade the government to pay depositors LE225 million, which is the total outstanding value of deposits in these companies, and in return own the assets. This should not be impossible, he said, given that the government recently decided to pay non-resident Egyptians employed abroad as much

as LE300 million in tax refunds, and that it bailed out depositors in the now-defunct Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Riham noted that the depositors in all these cases were Egyptians. He also said that the value of none of the MICs still unsold assets is enough to repay the remaining 954 depositors. Consequently, he said, the other option is to urge the government to include the assets of the MICs as part of the recent privatisation programme. The third option is for the government to offer banks, investors and businessmen a chance to purchase the MICs' assets.

However, said Riham, the government's recent decision to sell off a number of public companies has

dampened his hope of selling the MICs. Last February, Riham publicly offered the sale of part of the El-Seid Company's assets. So far, he has not received any offers for this MIC. One reason, he said, could be that some company owners resorted to illegal practices in an attempt to reduce their debt figures. A fact-finding committee formed by Riham discovered that officials at El-Hegaz Company, an MIC, forged money repayment vouchers to increase the amounts of money paid to investors.

During last week's committee discussions, members pointed an accusing finger at the government, arguing that it was responsible for the plight of these companies. Ibrahim El-Nimaki, the committee's deputy

chairman, considered the MICs' dilemma as the biggest swindling operation in history. In 1992, he said, former Prime Minister Ataf Sedki pledged to find a solution to problems confronting the MICs. Their total assets at the time were estimated at LE4.5 billion. "Now it is 1996 and there seems no end in sight," El-Nimaki said.

Abdel-Moneim El-Oleini, an independent MP from Tanta, demanded that the Socialist prosecutor-general put an end to the system of giving depositors consumer goods instead of their money.

El-Oleini charged that the goods are being sold at four times their original price. In response, Riham said that he appointed experts to en-

sure that goods are sold at market prices. Samah Ashour, the only Nasserist MP, charged that entrusting the Socialist prosecutor-general and the prosecutor-general with the task of selling off the assets of the MICs was a major mistake. "I think it was easier to divert the assets of these companies some years ago when there was a thriving market, but now it is too difficult since the government has taken steps to sell off public sector assets," said Ashour.

The SPG, however, outlined his achievements during fiscal 1993/94 in a report submitted to the committee. Among these achievements were the repayment of LE320 million to depositors in El-Seid company, 80 per cent of the LE285 mil-

lion owed to depositors in El-Hoda Misr company, and 48 per cent in El-Hegaz company. Repayment made by exchanging assets for goods involved 17,932 depositors in El-Seid Company, who were given goods valued at LE10 million, and 11,491 depositors in El-Hoda Misr Company who were refunded in goods valued at about LE38 million. Depositors in the Badr Company, who numbered 10,225, received goods valued at around LE50 million as refunds. The SPG also reviewed other achievements that included investigating the complaints of around 4,700 citizens, repaying around LE5.9 million in settlement of these complaints.

Marketing the privatisation bill

The government is not rushing headlong in privatising public enterprises, asserted the minister of the public enterprise sector, Ataf Ebeid, at a conference organised by Ain Shams University's Faculty of Commerce this week. Entitled "Privatisation and Securities", the conference was attended by a number of prominent economists and leading government officials.

Reviewing the current status of the privatisation programme, Ebeid said that the total value of state-owned companies is LE600 billion, but that only 314 companies, regulated by Law 203 and valued at LE88 billion will be affected by the privatisation programme. "State-owned assets, including other public sector companies not regulated by Law 203, economic institutions, public sector banks and insurance companies, joint ventures and companies under establishment will not be affected," he said.

The 314 companies to be privatised, however, have a combined debt of LE77 billion, said Ebeid, adding that privatising them will be of benefit to their creditors. Ebeid also assured the audience that the techniques adopted for privatisation were well-studied. "The evaluation of the assets of profitable companies is carried out by a number of highly qualified ex-

Participants at a two-day conference last week stressed that the development of a capital market was imperative for the success of the privatisation process. **Sherine Abdel-Razek attended**

persons who submit their evaluation to the boards of the companies, the Central Auditing Agency and to the office of the Minister of the Public Sector," Ebeid said.

A number of studies on privatisation and the stock market were presented at the conference, which gave top priority to the issue of methods of evaluating state-owned enterprises. The emphasis here lay on the difficulty of evaluating fixed assets.

Ismael Hassan, governor of the Central Bank, reviewed the role of the banking sector in privatisation, stressing the importance of bank credit as a source for financing economic reform and the privatisation programme.

Also stressing the importance of banks, participants called for the liberalisation of the banking sector, suggesting that this can be undertaken by lifting ceilings on bank credit and making it easier for new banks to be es-

tablished. Such policies, it was argued, will increase financial resources and minimise the cost of credit granted to the private sector.

Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, chairman of the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), stressed that the capital market has a great role in the debt settlement and the financial restructuring of public sector companies. He revealed that the NBE plans to activate the capital market by selling LE400 million of its holdings in 30 joint venture banks and companies.

For his part, the head of the capital market authority, Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim, was confident that the capital market could handle any number of future issues.

Arthur Anderson, a major consulting firm participating in the privatisation process, presented two papers to the conference. The first paper the firm reviewed the different privatisation strategies, which include public offering of shares, selling to anchor investors and management contracts, assessing their viability in terms of the goals of the privatisation process. They also stressed that the capital market was an indispensable feature of the privatisation process. The second paper dealt with the methods of settling the debts of state-owned enterprises.

Lebanon promotes building contracts

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri, while on a visit to Cairo this week, called on Egyptian investors and contractors to get in on the post-civil war building boom in Lebanon. **Niveen Wahlah reports**

A visit by Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri, to Egypt, triggered hopes of greater bilateral economic and commercial exchange in the near future.

Addressing members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AmCham) while in Cairo last week, Hariri said that Egyptian-Lebanese political and historical relations have not been equal on the economic level. He attributed this to the fact that both sides have not looked at the overall benefit they stand to gain from promoting such cooperation. Hariri pointed out that Egyptian investors and contractors have a great opportunity of investing in the rebuilding of Lebanon. With Lebanon currently undertaking a major reconstruction of its infrastructure, "Egyptian companies have a strong chance of winning the contracts because their low costs make them competitive," Hariri said.

The Lebanese prime minister emphasised that his government was not undertaking any of the projects itself, but was providing the appropriate climate to encourage investments through legislation. The Lebanese government, he added, has also created an institution, affiliated to the prime minister's office, specifically to promote investments.

Rebuilding the infrastructure includes the airport,

schools, hospitals, the Lebanese University, roads, the Beirut city centre, water and drainage projects.

The reconstruction of the infrastructure is being accompanied by a plan to improve living standards, said Hariri. Public and private sector employee wages have been raised and social services, such as schools, universities and hospitals are being upgraded.

Speaking of Lebanon's achievements since the end of the war, Hariri noted that the interest rate has dropped from over 100 per cent to about 16 per cent. Lebanon also boasts financial stability; the Lebanese lira rose in value from 3,000 lira per US dollar to 1,585 lira per US dollar.

Inflation has also dropped to around 10 per cent, while the economy has been growing at a rate of 7.5 per cent. Hariri assured that the rate of growth will continue its upward trend, but admitted that it would be difficult to maintain the same percentage of growth as incomes rise.

Hariri added that although rebuilding Lebanon is costing billions of dollars, the government will not be spending anything out of its own budget. As a result, it will depend on easy loans, grants and private investors to carry out the job.

Market report

GMI falls again

CONTINUING to slip, the General Market Index for the week ending 14 March, lost 0.77 points to close at 203.97, with LE39.42 million in shares changing hands.

The index for the manufacturing sector, however, parted ways with the pattern and gained a modest 0.89 points to level off at 267.54. Some companies in the sector had a taste of sweet success. Shares of the Egypt Macaroni and Carbohydrates Company recorded the highest increase in share value, jumping up by 50 per cent of its opening value to close at LE1,500. Two pharmaceutical companies also performed well. The Nile Pharmaceutical and Chemical Industries Company's shares gained LE1.45 to close at LE59 per share, while those of the Alexandria Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company closed at LE76.1, an increase of LE1.05 over the opening price.

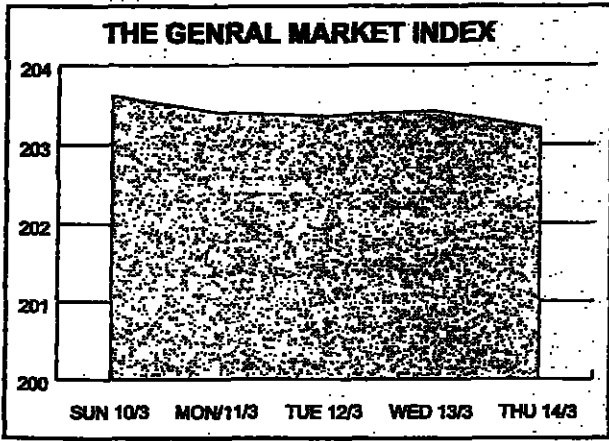
On the flip side of the coin, 15 companies witnessed a decrease in their share value. The drop in value ranged from LE7 for the shares of the Alexandria Portland Cement Company, which closed at LE351, to LE0.07 for those of the To-

rah Portland Cement Company, which leveled off at LE43.18 per share.

The index for the financial, insurance and real estate sector was hit by a 4.26 drop leaving it at 211 points. The Heliopolis for Housing and Development Company's shares swallowed a loss of LE25 per share to close at LE220, while those of the Commercial International Bank lost LE11 to end at LE455. Shares of the Alexandria Commercial and Marine Bank led the market in terms of value and volume of trading. In heavy trading action, LE6 million of the company's shares changed hands, accounting for 16.25 per cent of total market transactions. It traded 109,100 of its shares, which gained LE1.25 to close at LE55. But it was the Cairo Housing and Development Company's shares that suffered the biggest loss, closing at LE14.28 per share after a 18.49 per cent drop in their value.

In all, the shares of 28 decreased, those of 24 increased and 26 remained unchanged.

Edited by Ghada Ragab



Selling like hot cakes


EGYPT'S first corporate bond issue by a bank closed 133.5 per cent over-subscribed last week. The issue, launched for public subscription by Citibank on 24 February, was originally intended to sell LE200 million worth of five-year bonds. However, over LE450 million in bonds were sold. Accordingly, the bonds were allocated pro-rata. Each buyer received approximately 42 per cent of the amount for which they originally subscribed.

To encourage small investors, the bonds were valued at LE1,000 each, with a minimum of five bonds per buyer required for the sale. There was no maximum ceiling.

The issue was underwritten by Banque Misr, while Concord International Partners were the consultants for the operation. The bonds provide investors with a regular quarterly revenue calculated according to the three-month treasury bill interest rate.

According to Citibank vice president and country corporate officer, Ahmed El-Bardai, the bond issue "underscores the bank's commitment to building its business in Egypt."

Lisez dans



□ Fête des mères
Portraits en famille

□ Nouvelle de Mohamad Moustagab
Senn Al-Gabal

□ Sommet de Charm Al-Cheikh
La paix relancée malgré les blocages

□ Fin de deux ans de couvre-feu
Mallaoui réapprend à vivre

□ Le ministre libanais de l'Economie
La classe moyenne est de retour

Rédacteur en Chef
Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président
et **Rédacteur en Chef**
Ibrahim Nafie

Youssef Boutros Ghali, who at 43 is among the youngest members of the cabinet, defies the adage that "those who can, do, and those who can't, teach." Both an academic and a policy-maker, he began his career in government in 1986 as an economic advisor to the Prime Minister. Since then his various, and often overlapping, government posts, included acting as economic advisor to the Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, Minister of State at the Council of Ministers and Minister of State for International Cooperation. Throughout, he has been, and remains, one of the principal architects of the economic reform programme.

In his present capacity as Minister of State for Economic Affairs, he is entrusted with coordinating economic policy and ensuring that reform measures are harmonious and complementary.

He brings to his post a wealth of economic knowledge and experience gained through his various academic posts at Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from which he received his doctorate degree in 1981, and the American University in Cairo. To the lengthy and often difficult process of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, Ghali brings an insider's view, having served as a senior IMF economist from 1981-1986.

In a cross between a colourful lecture in market mechanisms and a discourse on the moving forces behind Egyptian reform policies, he spoke with Al-Ahram Weekly on the achievements of the Egyptian economic reform programme and future challenges.

The government had specific goals when it set out on the economic reform programme five years ago. How much has been achieved?

One hundred per cent. Let's take the budget, which is the central element that drives the entire first phase. We wanted to get the budget deficit down to about 2.5 per cent. Through permanent measures which would guarantee that the budget deficit would go down year after year, we were able to bring the deficit down to 1.6 per cent of GDP, and it looks like it will stay at this level for the second consecutive year. So this target was achieved earlier than we anticipated and in a more sustainable fashion than we thought.

Second, the average inflation rate for the past twelve months is 8.2 per cent. Price levels in November 1995 compared to November 1994 increased by only 4.9 per cent. We have never seen an inflation rate of 4.9 per cent in thirty years. This means we have started touching our trading partners' inflation rates.

We have broken the barrier of double-digit inflation to a single digit, which is likely to be closer to five per cent than to 10 per cent.

On the balance of payments front, we had hoped we would get by on near balance after 1991, perhaps with a small surplus, but nothing dramatic. What actually happened was that we accumulated \$18 billion and we have a balance of payments today that is projected to remain solidly in surplus for the coming two to three years. So we have over-achieved on that front also.

On the exchange rate issue, we have agreed in the design of our programme that we would use something called a nominal anchor, a focus around which prices can stabilise and inflation can drop. We chose the exchange rate as our nominal anchor and built our programme so that the exchange rate would stay constant for a while until the system calms down. We were hoping the exchange rate would stay more or less constant. We did not fix it, we floated it, but we adjusted the rest of the economy so that it would not need to move. We were hoping that by 1993, it would start moving.

Instead, we did things in such a way that confidence was restored very quickly and capital started flowing to the system which kept this exchange rate fixed for much longer than we had anticipated, giving us additional benefits for having the exchange rate naturally fixed for longer than our system was going to keep it. This made the transition easier, not us substantially more reserves and gave us the time to solidify all the other components of the reform programme.

On the monetary front, we had had liquidity — the amount of pounds circulating in the economy — growing by 40 per cent a year, which was fuelling inflation. Now it grows at between nine and 11 per cent, which is a healthy rate.

We have liberalised most prices, without major disturbances. So all of these are very substantial successes in the first phase.

Now the challenge of the second phase is to generate growth; to have all of these financial balances maintained while generating economic growth.

What are the areas which still concern the government and which are not responding to reform measures?

It is not an issue of bad response, but what remains to be done in the second phase of reform. There are two components for the success of a reform programme: a stable financial environment and growth. The financial balance of the economy must be achieved and must be sustainable. Inflation should be in the single digit; the current account could be in a slight deficit, but a sustainable deficit; your foreign currency reserves should be reasonably stable. Ours are more than adequate. They have reached the equivalent of 22 months of imports, the standards for a country like Egypt being 12-15 months of imports. Your budget deficit must be reasonably under control, your money supply must be under control. Ours is a sustainable financial equilibrium.

The second point is that you need a country that grows. Our population grows by about 2.2 per cent and, therefore, our labour force grows and our employment needs grow. Our people have aspirations to a better standard of living. To do all of this the economy has to grow. You cannot grow unless you have financial stability, but financial stability is only a necessary, and not a sufficient, condition for growth to happen. We are now engaged in generating growth, in orienting this economy towards self-sustaining growth, but without upsetting the financial balance.

For example, the easy way to generate growth is to open up the budget deficit. You spend, which typically causes demand, which causes growth and you can grow at 7-9 per cent for about three years. And then it catches up with you. The budget deficit causes money supply to increase, money supply causes inflation to increase, inflation disrupts the investment process. What you spend on one end the private sector stops spending on the other. The result is you can grow at 7 per cent for three years but after that you are back to square one. So the trick is to generate growth without upsetting the financial balance. The fundamentals of the second phase lie in changing the relationship between the government and the productive system. You notice I am not saying the private sector. I lump both public and private sectors together.

There is another concept that drives the second phase, and that is to give the lead role for economic activity to the private sector and to change the nature

The 7% challenge

The main challenge facing the Egyptian economy in its second phase of reform is to generate growth without upsetting the financial balance achieved in the first phase. Minister of State for Economic Affairs Youssef Boutros Ghali speaks with Ghada Ragab

of the government's involvement in the economy, through privatisation.

You will find resistance to privatisation among workers because they are worried, and among the public sector, because they are at stake. But also among the public you will find a very schizophrenic attitude. The public complains of wastage in the public sector but yet sometimes oppose the idea of selling it. They tend to confuse in their minds the reduction of the public sector with the disappearance of the social function of government. They have every right to be worried.

The government has to take care of the unemployed, the retired, perform education and health care. What people do not understand is that in effect, getting rid of the productive side of the government strengthens its ability to perform its social functions because it provides it with resources.

Would the government at this point still be able to offer these services free of charge?

Yes, even more so than when it had to perform both functions. We are concentrating on what the government does best, which is providing social services and we can do so now because we have a stable financial environment. We could not do so before. Who in his right mind was going to buy a factory if he could not find foreign exchange, if the inflation rate was 30 per cent, if he could not export, if he could not import. Now that the system is liberalised, is open to the outside world, is stable, then someone can come to purchase these factories and make them operate efficiently.

To what extent do public sector companies represent an attractive business opportunity, especially to foreign investors?

Obviously, not all of them. Some need restructuring before they can be an attractive investment, some will never be an attractive investment, and therefore have to be taken care of within the government. But for a large part all are very sensible and valid investments. Otherwise no one would buy.

Perhaps the private sector would be a better judge. What I would see as a basket case, they might see as a jewel. Businessmen tell us that there are wonderful opportunities. The market will tell us.

In the context of this changing relationship between the government and the productive sectors, how will privatisation proceeds be used?

We are going to spend the proceeds of privatisation to strengthen the social functions of government by three methods. The first and most efficient way is reducing the domestic debt. This is the source of the

privatisation proceeds can also be used to take care of labour that needs redeployment as a result of privatisation. We have built our privatisation programme so as not to increase unemployment. Therefore, we are willing to spend some of these proceeds in re-employing redundant labour by providing them with initial capital to be self-employed or retraining them to work in other industries.

The third use of privatisation proceeds is to restructure existing companies. Companies which need technical knowledge and are, therefore, not saleable need to be restructured and often need an infusion of capital to reorganise their debt-equity ratios and their financial structures. This we are willing to do within limited bounds.

What are the fundamental principles guiding the second phase of the reform programme?

In the last World Economic Summit in Davos, I spent time with four major world renowned reformers. We tried to figure out what were the ingredients of the success of countries which have achieved growth rates of over 5 per cent for sustained periods of time. These are Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Chile, Mauritius and Singapore. We came up with six ingredients for a successful reform programme. These are, in fact, the bases of the second phase of the reform programme.

First, you need a stable financial environment, and this we have. Second, avoid policy surprises. Do not surprise markets. Avoid financial crises by any means; they are costly, long to get rid of and very painful. Take care of your banking system and do not let it collapse because you insist on applying the rules of the market. We have to maintain a stable and predictable environment. Third, liberalise trade. All countries which have achieved high growth rates have entered into trade liberalisation programmes. Fourth, privatise. Get rid of the public sector, get out of production. The public sector distorts market mechanism. Fifth, it is essential to save. If you have low savings, you have low investments, which mean low growth rates.

The savings rate in these countries ranges between 28-34 per cent. For Egypt it is about 13-16 per cent. If we are going to achieve a growth rate of 7 per cent we are going to need a savings rate of 28-30 per cent. That means we have to bring in other savings from other sources. These are foreign investment and foreign borrowing. We have to be able to attract foreign investment. We are competitive in incentives but we have to be competitive in terms of the investment environment.

Sixth, consistency in the application of the legal framework. Clean the government and eliminate cor-

ruption which distorts market signals, puts obstacles in the process of market functioning and is detrimental to an efficient investment climate.

All these are the principles guiding the second phase of the reform programme. They are the policies being followed by the government. They are driven by conviction and by the experience of other countries.

Who will the second phase of reform benefit?

The first phase of the reform programme benefited producers because a producer cannot produce in an unstable financial environment. Producers are affected by shortages in foreign currency, shortages in the credit system, and high inflation. In the first phase of the reform producers got a stable environment. The main section of the economy that footed the bill for the first phase was the consumer, who took an important hit. Purchasing powers were reduced, taxes were raised, subsidies eliminated, etc. This is not a matter of choice, it is an inevitable phase that any serious reform programme has to go through. Nobody has yet invented a reform programme that does not have this first initial painful phase.

The main section of the economy that footed the bill for the first phase was the consumer, who took an important hit... In the second phase, the roles are reversed. The consumer benefits and the producer is called upon to deliver

have to invest money in generating data. Policies have to be clear and predictable.

The third element is the constancy of policies. Policies should be established so that people can express an opinion about them. Markets will react to policies, you should not hinder that reaction, on the contrary, take feedback from the market to adjust your policies.

Which sector of the economy are you counting on to be the leader of this growth?

Exports. Tradables in general. Any commodity that is tradable internationally is going to be the focus of the other policies of the package. Of those, exportables are going to be the most important.

What rate of growth does the economy need to be able to catch up with unemployment and absorb new entrants into the job market?

Seven per cent.

Given the untapped potentials of the economy, is it such a difficult task to bring the rate of growth up by three per cent?

It is very difficult. Keeping an economy in financial balance while having it grow at rates of 6-8 per cent is a very difficult task because typically everything tends to slip in the opposite direction.

It is extremely difficult at 4 per cent. It needs all sorts of ingredients of confidence from the investors. Then once the confidence is there, the investor has his money, his idea, he knows what he wants to do. Then you have to make sure that all the ingredients the investor needs are there. If the grassroots mechanisms and regulations as well as the bureaucracy are not geared towards

encouraging investment, it will not happen.

How is the government trying to create an investor-friendly environment?

We are deregulating the system. The first thing this cabinet took care of was the regulatory environment. There is a ministerial committee that deals with impediments to investments. We are taking those off as we go one by one.

We are also dealing with impediments to exports to make sure that investors can find markets for their products. Because if they cannot sell, they will not invest. So the government needs to remove the impediments to exports, to reduce the cost of transport, to deal with the bureaucrats and to help make exports more competitive by reducing taxes.

The government has just formed a new Higher Council for Exports, but exporters are saying they do not need more councils, but they do need tax rebates, subsidies, less bureaucracy...

We will have direct subsidies for exports, but when we deal with these issues we have to deal in a global way. This is a perfect example of how difficult it is to generate six per cent growth. Exporters need subsidies, which have to come from the budget. The budget deficit goes up, which means it starts feeding into inflation, prices start rising, dragging wages with them.

The exporter finds his wage bill starting to rise because the workers need more money to buy the same commodities. Because I gave him a subsidy that was not integrated into my overall policy, I gave it to him with one hand and the system changed in such a way that I took it away with the other. I have to give him the subsidy based on true resources. You can't generate something from nothing. It always comes back to haunt you.

But isn't it a matter of balancing the cost of this subsidy with the benefits of generating growth from exports?

Absolutely. The principle is there. Exporters need to be supported, but not necessarily in the shape of subsidies. For example, marketing and penetration of international markets needs development. We can help in that. The government can get experts from all over the world, pay them and ask them to help exporters carve a niche in their markets.

But the government needs to fit its support for exporters into overall equilibrium in the system, otherwise it is not viable. So our policy is to privatise, generate resources which go to the budget, where they in turn generate resources which can be used to subsidise exports. In the meantime I remove all the obstacles, and give forms of support that do not feed directly into the budget. For example, the government can give exporters subsidised financing, which does not feed directly into the budget. There are initial costs that we can bear in the budget without major disruption. If something costs LE60 million, no problem. Such an amount would have a massive impact on exporters, but for a budget that is LE70 billion, LE60 million could get lost in a statistical error.

Why do we have yet another higher council? We have never had a council for exports headed by the President. Promoting exports means giving priority to one activity over all other activities, which will undoubtedly also put on the table a conflict of priorities. For example, if a commodity is missing from the market, we have two solutions: Either we restrict exports of that commodity and keep local production to satisfy domestic demand, or we stay away from exports and deal with the shortage in some other way.

This represents a conflict of priorities. When we underscore the importance of exports, we immediately give it priority over other sectors in such conflicts.

Why isn't it possible to leave market mechanisms to sort out supply shortages?

If the market was developed, it would be able to do that. But not all market mechanisms exist at this time. This is an example of what I call market failure. Last year there was a local — not an international — shortage of vegetables due to bad weather. Nevertheless prices doubled in November, doubled in December and doubled in January.

Why didn't someone pick up the phone and call the Europeans or the Tunisians or the Moroccans and say "Guys, we need vegetables"? Because we do not have the network or the infrastructure.

By the time they woke up, the crisis had developed, prices went through the roof, and by the time the stuff came in, it was too late. As a result, we had four months of inflation rates that shot to 12 per cent because of vegetables, without anybody being able to do anything. There are no restrictions on either imports or exports of vegetables. The market was free to do what it wanted, but it could not react, because the infrastructure does not exist.

Does this imply that the government will continue to intervene in the market until it is more developed?

Of course, it has to. But we intervene now according to very specific rules. There are certain parameters that we cannot touch. We cannot fiddle with prices. We can fiddle with supply or help out by finding supply to compensate for the lack of market mechanisms.

The government also intervenes in the market to break monopolies. The government needs to maintain a presence in the market to make sure it functions the way it should.

What is the size of Egypt's foreign debt after the reductions agreed upon at the Paris Club?

The debts that were discussed at the Paris Club were about \$21 billion, in public and publicly-guaranteed debts. These were debts which were signed and contracted before 31 October, 1986. Of that amount \$6 billion was owed to the United States and the rest to all the other creditors.

Today, total Egyptian indebtedness to the world stands at about \$30 billion, including Paris Club creditors and other multilateral debts owed to the World Bank, the African Development Bank and various regional Arab funds.

There is also a secondary market in Egyptian debt. Yes, there is the official debt, for which we have signed an agreement in 1991, whereby we reduced it in present value terms by 50 per cent on three tranches.

Then there is the secondary market that has nothing to do with the Paris Club. These are creditors who are fed up with waiting for their money and who are willing to sell their paper to somebody else who needs that paper for a discount. The government agrees to buy this paper, but puts some restrictions.

Everybody benefits. The government gets rid of debts without shelling out a dollar. It pays in the local currency, over which it has control. The investor gets the difference between what he paid the creditor and what the Central Bank of Egypt is willing to pay for the debt. The CBE itself gains because it does not pay the full value of the debt. This value becomes a matter of negotiations.

So the value at which the CBE settles the debts has nothing to do with the debt reductions?

No, they are not related. The value the CBE settles the debts is driven by the demand on the secondary market for Egyptian bills. If a country is doing well, nobody wants to get rid of the paper they hold. They are sure that the country will repay its debts on time, without any problems. Why should creditors take \$50 for \$100 when they can get the full amount since it is good paper?

W

contract

Wahab

Selling like hot cakes



'The main section of the economy that footed the bill for the first phase was the consumer, who took an important hit... In the second phase, the roles are reversed. The consumer benefits and the producer is called upon to deliver'

permanent revenue in the budget. The domestic debt is in the order of LE120 billion. This costs LE15 billion per year in interest. So on average, for every one billion of debt we need about LE130 million of expenses in interest payments every year.

Now to be able to repay this debt I have to generate a budget surplus. This is not going to happen any time soon. Anything that reduces this amount is a gain to me. This means that if we can generate privatisation proceeds of one billion pounds, we can use that billion to repay some of the outstanding debt. For each one billion pounds I will no longer have to pay LE130 million of interest every year and, therefore, I can spend this amount without upsetting the balance.

This is the best use of privatisation proceeds. You want to expand workers salaries, subsidise health care, you get some proceeds and reduce the domestic debt. In the same manner, proceeds can also be used to streamline the taxation system to be compatible with international norms, or by eliminating the sales tax or by lowering tariffs. Lowering the cost of production improves the standard of living of the population because it gets them commodities cheaper.

ruption which distorts market signals, puts obstacles in the process of market functioning and is detrimental to an efficient investment climate.

All these are the principles guiding the second phase of the reform programme. They are the policies being followed by the government. They are driven by conviction and by the experience of other countries.

Who will the second phase of reform benefit?

Cuba's cross

Do not dismiss Cuba's self-confidence as pretentious. There is much to be proud about, proclaimed Jorge Pérez, the head of Cuba's visiting parliamentary delegation, when he spoke to **Gamal Nkrumah**

The Third World wants Cuba to survive intact. Or so the voting patterns at the United Nations tell us. The vote in the UN General Assembly against the American embargo last November was 117 to three. The vote in 1994 was 101 to two — the US and Israel. How is it that leaders of countries as far afield and as diverse ideologically as Russia and Mexico, South Africa and Iran, China and Vietnam, India and Pakistan do not want Cuba to go under? What is more, it appears that even Europe desires a defiant Cuba. American allies such as Canada and the European Union member-states have growing trade ties and investments in Cuba. Countries the world over — both friends and foes of America — have criticised the controversial legislation promulgated in Washington last week.

Last Tuesday, US President Bill Clinton signed into law new legislation strengthening the American sanctions against Cuba. The new bill, sponsored by Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Dan Burton and approved in both houses of Congress, permits Cuban Americans who lost property worth \$50,000 or more in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 to seek compensation. So American courts Clinton had earlier refused to go along with hard-liners in both houses of Congress. It was only after the furor that erupted on 24 February when two American planes were gunned down by Cuban fighter jets, killing four US nationals, that Clinton had an about-face.

The new bill enjoins American representatives in international financial institutions to counter any recommendations for loans or funding for Cuban development projects unless what he termed "a democratically elected" government is installed in Havana. "Today I sign [the new legislation] with the certainty that it will send a powerful and unified message from the US to Havana that the yearning of the Cuban people for freedom must not be denied," Clinton said. "The [legislation] will strengthen the embargo in a way that advances the cause of freedom in Cuba," he added. Jorge Pérez, chairman of the International Relations Committee of the Cuban National Assembly told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in Cairo last week: "We have to stand up to the flagrant beggar-thy-neighbour policy adopted by America."

Pérez was in Cairo as part of a tour of North Africa and the Middle East. He was accompanied by the head of the Cuba-Africa Friendship Society, Rodolfo Fierro, an old Africa hand in Cuban political establishment. They both stressed the defensive nature of Cuba's army. "Cuba is not in the process of acquiring nuclear weapons, and even if it was, it has not got the means to deliver weapons of mass destruction and destroy its foes," explained Cuban Army Chief-of-Staff Ulises Rosales recently. "Cuba's defences are exactly that — designed for defending its territorial integrity and national sovereignty," Pérez stressed.

What is of interest is that Cuba's survival, especially in the post-Cold War era, flies in the face of all theories of international relations. So why was Congressman Robert G. Torricelli proved wrong when he predicted in December 1992, after the enactment of his Cuban Democracy Act, that the island-nation's President Fidel Castro would not survive in power beyond 1993? Did Torricelli not realise that Castro's power was based on popular support? Did he think that the Cuban political establishment was going to cave in? Will the Republican-backed measure succeed in a presidential election year where the Torricelli act failed in 1992?

More recently, Republican Senator Jesse Helms boasted that Castro was on the ropes and needed only a final shove. But Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón brushed aside Helms' boasts. "The US cannot and never will be able to run the world," Alarcón said.

"We will stand with those both inside and outside Cuba who are working for a peaceful transition to freedom and democracy," Clinton said over the weekend. "Cuba's blatant disregard for international law is not just an issue between Havana and Washington, but between Havana and the world." But the world apparently disagrees. Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto González dismissed Clinton's threats as "empty and bound to fail."

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov called the latest American measures "counter-productive". Ivanov was not joking. Even as Cuban biogas fuel production quadruples and its domestic production of petroleum doubles, the Caribbean island-nations' imports of Russian oil are on the rise. "The measures aiming to reinforce sanctions are not helping to resolve the problem or create favourable conditions for the development of [free trade] relations," Ivanov warned. "The measures adopted by the US would not affect Russo-Cuban relations."

The Soviet collapse created economic problems in Cuba. The American embargo began to bite and, by 1992-1993, Cuba's recession hit rock bottom. But a Cuban economic turnaround followed. Foreign investors were courted and jump-started the cash-strapped economy. Carlos Dávila, the vice-president of the Council of State, now directs the Cuban economy.

Cuba differs from most other Third World nations in its readiness to contemplate standing up to America. It also stands out as a country proud to uphold its own brand of democracy. While most Third World nations have succumbed to Western pressures to institute multi-party democracy, Cuba has defiantly declined to

do so. Countries of the developing world of the South are watching closely the Cuban experiment.

"There are 589 members in the Cuban National Assembly," explained Pérez. "Cuban members of parliament are elected for roughly every 20,000 citizens in urban centres. In some rural areas, members represent constituencies of about 10,000 or more. Cuban parliamentarians are not professional politicians and do not receive a salary for their parliamentary services." Cuban parliamentarians are supported by some eight million members of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution. "Cubans vote in fair and democratic municipal elections. Cubans do not have to be members of the Communist Party to run for office. Voting is by secret ballot and the process of nominating candidates is open to all citizens," Pérez stressed.

Is Cuba susceptible to outside pressure to reform its political system? What about pressures from European and Latin American nations to politically liberalise and enhance representative democracy in Cuba? "We reject such pressure as an infringement of our national sovereignty and gross interference in our domestic affairs," Pérez said. "We do not accept such pressure from friend or foe," he added sternly. "Instead of a multi-party system, we have a no-party system," Pérez explained. "Look at the multi-party political system's attendant problems all over the world: bribery by big business of party bosses, corruption scandals and the many problems related to the funding of political parties," he said.

"The multi-party system is defective. Few Third World countries still insist on a one-party system, but the alternative they have adopted is far from perfect. Our political system is based on our own historical experience. We chose our own political, economic and social system. We have fashioned our own democracy according to our own historical realities. Cuba defends its right to choose its own political system," Pérez said.

"We develop and practice our own brand of democracy. We receive the respect of a wide section of world opinion. We had for some 60 years a multi-party system. But history proves that with the multi-party system all political parties were subject to American hegemony and served American interests," Pérez said. "Illiteracy, poor health, unemployment, deplorable social conditions and endemic racism were rife in Cuba under the multi-party system. Today, the Cuban people enjoy the best educational and health system of any Latin American nation. There is no narcotics problem in Cuba. Our streets are the safest in the region. There are no homeless or destitute Cubans, unlike in other countries of the Americas which claim to be democratic," he stressed.

"Popular participation is not confined to choosing the people's representatives and elected leaders, but also includes monitoring the work of the elected officials. The Cuban people are decision-makers and are consulted in important matters where they take part in referendums," Pérez said. "It is not compulsory to vote but people turn out in the millions to elect their representatives. Over 95 per cent of the Cuban electorate vote — a turnout that is far higher than in countries with the multi-party system. Cubans vote every five years to elect their deputies and every two-and-a-half years to elect their local government officials."

Pérez downplayed the potential importance of the Cuban crisis in this November's American presidential election. Florida is the US state where most Cubans who flee their country go to. Clinton lost Florida by a hair's breadth in 1992. But Florida's Cuban immigrants now account for only six per cent of all legal immigrants to the state. Mexicans account for 30 per cent, Haitians for 21 per cent and Jamaicans and Colombians for four per cent each. So we can discount the theory that the Clinton administration will effectively use the Cuban card to win votes in the forthcoming American presidential election.

This is Pérez's first official visit to the region. "I am here to strengthen ties between Cuban parliamentarians and those in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia," he said. "We in Cuba want to study at close hand the parliamentary system and political developments in the region. We also see this as an opportunity to explain our point of view to the Egyptians and others in the region. There is another Cuban parliamentary delegation that is visiting Lebanon, Syria and Morocco and several sub-Saharan African nations," he added.

"It is important for Cuba to cultivate closer ties with Egypt, which is a [non-permanent] member of the Security Council. I met Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Parliament Speaker Fathi Sorour and Shura Council head Mustafa Kamel Helmy. I met with the Egyptian Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, the minister of agriculture and the secretary-general of the ruling National Democratic Party," Pérez said. He also met with officials from the Arab League.

"Everyone I met expressed sympathy for the Cuban cause and I was impressed by their understanding of the current situation," Pérez said. "Egypt, like Cuba, is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement." Fierro, the Africa specialist, chimed in. "And the two countries must coordinate their policies concerning NAM solidarity. Egypt and Cuba must work closely together to defend the interests of the South in international forums."



Taiwanese nightmare

THE TAIWANESE are preparing for their first democratic presidential election on Saturday. Pro-independence activists are running in the election and Beijing has threatened to invade Taiwan if the islanders vote for independence from China. Beijing considers Taiwan to be a province of China and expects re-unification with the mainland at some future date.

"It is the first ever free presidential election in 5,000 years of Chinese history," declared incumbent Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui. Lee, who steered the island away from authoritarian Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) rule, incurred the wrath of China when he toured the United States last year. The Kuomintang dominated Taiwanese politics until recently, ever since General Chiang Kai-Shek fled to the island from mainland China in the aftermath of World War II.

Tensions in the Taiwan Straits rose sharply this week as China announced that it would carry out live-fire sea and air exercises there. China's People's Liberation Army is the world's largest with over three million men. Taiwan has some 376,000 troops, but they are far better equipped than the PLA.

Beijing is flexing its muscles in an unprecedented show of strength. And as Chinese leaders ratchet up military pressure on Taiwan, Chi-

nese Premier Li Peng warned the US against interfering in the latest crisis. The aircraft carrier USS Independence is currently moving towards Taiwanese territorial waters and Washington has expressed concern over what it views as Beijing's intimidatory war games. "The question of Taiwan is China's internal affair," Li warned. Taiwanese Chief-of-Staff General Lo Pen-Li retorted, "We will by no means be soft-hearted or weak-handed," when he inspected his troops on the islands of Quemoy and Pescadores in the 150-mile-wide Taiwan Straits that separate Taiwan from the mainland. Taiwan, with American backing, is determined to remain an independent political and economic entity.

Taiwan purchased 150 US-made F-16 and 60 French Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets earlier this year. Taiwan has 365 warplanes of the F-5A, F-5E, F-104 and IDP models, which are far superior to the rather outdated 4,800 fighters owned by the People's Republic of China. However, has recently received 24 Russian Sukhoi-27 fighters. Moreover, China is stepping up its efforts to upgrade its communications systems. "The Chinese have drawn lessons from the 1991 Gulf War. They know that modern warfare is electronic," explained Yang Chia-Heng of Taiwan's Institute for National Political Research. (photo: AFP)

Angolan peace in the balance

March began with Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and opposition leader Jonas Savimbi meeting in the Gabonese capital Libreville. For the fourth time since the signing of the Lusaka peace accord 15 months ago, Angola's rival leaders tried to give peace another chance. At the summit, both parties agreed to make a sincere effort to merge their military forces by June this year and to form a government of national unity a month later.

Last week, however, United Nations and United States officials warned that both the Angolan government and Savimbi's UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) continue to import weapons as a form of insurance in case the peace process fails. The UN envoy to Angola, Alioune Blondin Beye, said both sides were buying weapons with the proceeds from Angola's rich diamond mines and oil fields.

The 20-year-long civil war, which started on the eve of Angola's independence from Portugal in 1975, utterly devastated the country. It cost the lives of about 500,000 of the country's 10 million people and turned an estimated 1.3 million more into refugees. The fighting has been primarily between Dos Santos' MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and Savimbi's UNITA. The MPLA, which until recently professed a Marxist-Leninist ideology, received military support from the Soviet Union and Cuba, the latter sending a total of 50,000 troops. UNITA turned to South Africa, the People's Republic of China and the US for help. Although the war was in many ways a Cold War proxy fight, it had an ethnic dimension as well: the MPLA drew most of its support from the ethnic Mbundu who predominate in the country's north-central region and the mulattoes who occupy the capital Luanda, while UNITA relied on the rival Ovimbundu in the south.

The first attempt to end the fighting took place in 1992, through the election ballot. This was unsuccessful because Savimbi alleged that the polls were fraudulent and the country was plunged back into civil war. This second phase of the war was bloodier and more widespread. By the end of 1992 UNITA occupied more than half the country's territory, including cities and areas it had never managed to control during the previous 16 years of armed struggle. By February 1993, 15,000 more lives had been lost since the election.

The war was officially ended in 1994 with the Lusaka peace accord. The accord stipulated that troops from both sides would be demobilised and that UNITA would ultimately participate in the government, with control of the four ministries, three provinces and dozens of municipalities and communes

This month, the Angolan peace process went through a worrying succession of ups and downs. **Sophia Christoforakis** explains why

which it won during the 1992 elections.

At the latest summit, held in Gabon because Savimbi refused to go to Luanda, the UNITA leader claimed that he would not be safe in the capital. This is an indication of how tense the relations between these two old rivals are even after the signing of the peace accord. The UN had been demanding the Gabon summit since the end of last year, when it became clear that the Lusaka accord was being implemented at a very slow pace.

Both parties were under pressure to come to an understanding or lose the slowly dwindling support of the international community. International pressures also dictated the content of the talks. The negotiations revolved primarily around the military issues of contention: between the two parties, since the UN and the observer countries see full compliance with the military aspects of the Lusaka accord as being vital before the political features of the accord can be implemented.

It was agreed at the summit that the two sides would merge military forces by June this year. The amalgamation has been on the agenda since the early '90s. In 1992 both parties resolved to demobilise and integrate their armies before the elections, but this was never achieved. The slow process led to suspicions on either side that the other was scheming to retain its own armed force.

The new united army will consist of 90,000 men, including 26,300 from UNITA's armed wing. A major issue of contention pertaining to the merging of the military forces has been the number of generals that will be admitted from either side. UNITA wanted to place 40 of its generals at the head of the new army, but the MPLA was only willing to allow 11. The issue was finally resolved and there will be 18 senior UNITA generals in the new army. In an ultimate show of mutual trust, UNITA handed over a list of its cadres to the MPLA.

The primary hindrance to the amalgamation of the two armies is the slow pace at which the UNITA forces are entering UN-monitored camps. In mid-January Savimbi promised US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright that 16,500 UNITA soldiers would be regrouped into camps before 8 February, the date on which the Security Council was due to meet to review the renewal of its

peacekeeping unit's mandate in Angola. The pledge was not kept and the UN decided to extend the mandate of its 7,000-strong verification mission UNAVEM for another three months. The mission costs the UN an astronomical \$1 million daily.

To date, only 13,000 of UNITA's 60,000 fighters have been grouped at officially recognised points and a total of 12,700 weapons have been handed in. But the Angolan government claims that UNITA is only sending the very young and the very old to the camps, instead of its top military cadres. The government also claims that the bulk of the weapons handed in are obsolete. Savimbi said that "clearer modalities for completing the encampment of UNITA forces" were outlined in the recent summit. This primarily consists of plans to upgrade food and housing conditions in the UN camp sites, in an effort to make the camp sites more attractive to the soldiers.

In the political negotiations both sides compromised on earlier hard-line stances. Dos Santos offered Savimbi the vice-presidency. Savimbi confirmed the offer to news reporters, but declined to say whether he would accept the position. Savimbi agreed to send his deputies back into parliament — into the positions which they had left after the civil war erupted in 1992. Savimbi had previously demanded 50 per cent of government positions — more than the four cabinet portfolios and seven vice-ministerial posts he won during the 1992 elections. But in the recent summit he seemed to compromise on this issue. In this way UNITA has finally accepted the 1992 elections as legitimate.

Prior to the summit, Savimbi was pressing Dos Santos to negotiate the formation of a transitional government before his mandate expires in November. Dos Santos gave in to Savimbi's demand in the recent summit and it was agreed that the two parties would form a government of national unity by July this year. The formation of the new government by this date depends on the successful execution of the military resolutions.

At the end of the Gabon conference, Savimbi said, "What we have done today is to show Angolans and the world that there is no longer any blockade between the president and the leader of UNITA." However, while the leaders were negotiating, a transport plane with eight people aboard was shot down over a UNITA-controlled area in northeast Angola. UNITA denied responsibility for the incident and claimed that the plane was probably shot down by South African mercenaries who are preparing an attack on UNITA positions. This incident is indicative of the nightmarish situation that still prevails in large tracts of the Angolan countryside and shows that, despite the best efforts of Angola's leaders, the situation is still volatile.

Sarajevo's test

A DAY of intensive negotiations in Geneva was scaled last Monday with a 12-point plan to bolster the troubled Croat-Muslim federation. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who summoned the leaders of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia for the meeting, said the agreement moved the peace process into a "new phase" and "sets the stage for the Contact Group ministerial meeting in Moscow this Saturday".

Christopher announced that Croatia and Serbia had agreed to hand key war-crimes suspects over to UN prosecutors. Monday's talks came a month after the secretary of state called the Balkan leaders for talks in Rome to rescue the US-sponsored Dayton peace accord from crisis. Christopher said that Bosnia could now prepare for the critical next test — free elections, to be held in summer under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Serbia and Bosnia agreed to re-establish air links between their respective capitals and open talks on a range of road, rail and telecommunications links. Belgrade also agreed to re-open the Montenegrin port of Bar to commercial traffic bound for Bosnia.

Dole vs Clinton

AS NEXT week's California primary — likely to seal the Republican presidential nomination — approaches, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole is anxious to do battle with his real adversary, President Bill Clinton. Dole currently has 763 delegates to Pat Buchanan's 93 and his expected victory on 26 March in California is likely to give the 72-year-old Kansas senator more than the 596 delegates he needs for the August presidential nomination.

On Monday, Dole reproached Clinton for the longstanding impasse between the White House and the Republican-led Congress over the federal budget. The two sides have been unable to reach full accord on the fiscal 1996 budget, which started on 1 October 1995. Last week, Congress passed yet another temporary spending measure, to prevent a repeat of government shutdowns which idled hundreds of thousands of federal workers in December and January.

On Sunday, Buchanan left the possibility open that he might still compete in the 5 November presidential election as a third-party candidate, having conceded that he cannot win the Republican nomination. In another development, retired General Colin Powell denied rumours that he might run for vice-president as Dole's choice.

Compiled by
Haba Samir

Today, 21 March, marks the international day to combat racism. Al-Ahram Weekly looks into American dimensions of the phenomenon

The colour of power

In between hearings at the Pittsburgh Federal Courthouse Julia Wright caught up with former Black Panther activist and renowned journalist, Mumia Abu Jamal. What follows are extracts from the spirited exchange published here for the first time

Mumia Abu Jamal is on death row because he was convicted in 1982 of killing a white police officer, Daniel Farkner, in December 1981. The prosecutors claimed that ballistic evidence proved conclusively the case against Abu Jamal. The supporters of the former Black Panther activist counter that the case was fabricated and say that Abu Jamal is actually a political prisoner and a victim of America's racist judiciary.

The secretary-general of the International Writers Parliament, Christian Salmon, put down Abu-Jamal's conviction to what he called "judicial error" and added that it was "not accidental, but constructed". Abu Jamal's supporters are confident that if justice were to be done, and America's judiciary's racism exposed, the former Black Panther would be exonerated. Salmon put it succinctly when he said "Who could wish for a more ideal culprit for the murder of a white police officer than this black man, a former Black Panther militant and a journalist denouncing police brutality against the African American community?"

Abu Jamal, who was an accomplished professional journalist and a celebrated political activist fighting for the rights of African Americans, had written a series of internationally acclaimed articles on capital punishment and prison life in America.

Mumia, I would like to place at the beginning of this interview a quote from my father, Richard Wright, describing how he came to write *Black Boy*. And I would like to dedicate this quote to you, if I may. My father wrote in 1944, half a century ago: "I wanted to give, lend my tongue to the voiceless Negro boys. 'Not until the sun ceases to shine on them, will I disown them.' That was one of my motives." I am very honoured and moved to be finally interviewing you today because I believe you are the spiritual and intellectual twin of both Richard Wright and Walt Whitman.

Thank you very much. It is a dual honour, but I think that, with all due respect to your father, I am his spiritual son not his twin. It is a dual honour to be speaking to you, the daughter of one of the giants of the black literary canon. And I remember reading that book when I was a boy — a "black boy" — and seeing the world open up and ripen to me in a way that it had not before. So it's mutual.

Mumia, coming from France where the death penalty was abolished 15 years ago, I am deeply shocked. You sit through these civil rights hearings with your back turned to us — fair enough — but with shackles left on your feet in spite of over a dozen armed security guards in the courtroom and who knows how many more throughout the courthouse — and plain clothes men, and surveillance cameras throughout the block and probably the neighbourhood.

What might be even more amazing is that this is a civil proceeding in a federal building and in a sense unrelated to my "criminal case". If I were in a hearing or a trial or even a re-trial of my criminal case, I would not have shackles on, I would not have gone through that. I must say, in all fairness to the judge, I don't believe that was his decision. I believe that was the US Marshall's decision. But the judge has expressed to the lawyers that he has no control over that.

Do they leave them on while you have lunch in the courthouse cell?

Yes. So, sometimes, for eight hours a day, I am in shackles. There have been occasions where it's more like 11 hours in shackles. While I am in a cage downstairs I'm in shackles. While I'm in court I'm in shackles. And when I return to the cage and am transported back to this jail I'm

in shackles. It is an extraordinary experience.

Do they leave blisters?

Yes.

Do you know what it reminds me of?

Slavery days?

Yes, runaway slaves.

We cannot run away from our history and I think it is in the interest of the state to depict me as a maniac, raving madman. So they go the whole length by shackling me inside the courtroom with maybe 15 security people around me. And it's overkill.

This is a civil rights suit brought by yourself against the State Correctional Institute in Greene County, your prison, and the Pennsylvania State Department of Corrections for their infringement of your constitutional rights from the time your book *Live From Death Row* was due to be published. What's happening today? How do you keep in touch with events in the world? Are you now having access to your family, other visitors, paralegals, journalists, spiritual advisers? Is the attempt to seal you off continuing?

That is very true. Even as we speak, my two primary paralegals, Jamila Levi and Pam Africa, are not allowed in to see me. In fact none of my paralegals are allowed to visit me as such. Even as a personal visitor, Pam Africa was recently turned away on the basis that her identification was defective — "it didn't have her address". This is the same identification issued by the government and that she has used for over 10 years. So, for me to suggest it's pretextual is an understatement.

As for visits, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has made it their intention to banish me to the farthest point of the commonwealth, to Greene County which is the diametric opposite of Philadelphia in terms of the geography of this state. So visits are automatically incredibly difficult. One per week — family — when it's impossible, unless we were very wealthy people, to make that kind of trip. At the present time, I am not generally restricted from books, law books and publications. Although publications that have been deemed radical in nature, like *The Revolutionary Worker* and *The Burning Spear*, put out by the African People's Socialist Party, are routinely denied and have never been allowed in. I think, since October 1987. Very recently, the August issue of *Workers' Vanguard* — one which I am told, deals almost totally with my post-conviction hearing in the criminal case — was banned as incendiary and violating, as causing a clear and present threat and danger to the government. So, it continues. Someone that I didn't know sent me a bible recently and that was confiscated. One may purchase radio and TV. I have and I watch and listen to both. In terms of videos, I can't see the documentaries that have been done about myself.

Do you have any comment you'd like to make on the testimonies you've heard since the hearings of your civil rights case began?

I have been surprised, on the one hand, and not surprised, on the other, at the depth of pettiness of the government when it comes to trying to create a crime out of something that is overtly and nakedly constitutional. The first amendment to the US Constitution states that freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion and freedom of association shall not be infringed. These rights are protected in the first amendment; every schoolchild is taught that. I imagine every child in France is taught the Declaration of Rights. In America, it's the constitution and that's a kind of secular religion.

But when the government wants to silence the speaker — if they don't want to hear the speech — then the constitution be dead. I have been sanctioned. I have been quote unquote — I hate using this word — "disciplined" for writing, for engaging in the business or profession of a journalist — one of the few professions in America that are explicitly protected by the constitution.

Mumia, we have been sitting for four days in the Pittsburgh Federal Courthouse and we have mainly been hearing about prison policy regulation number 50 and so, memos, dates, codes, invisible exhibits, etc. Then, yesterday, you took the stand and spoke up. Could you sum up for us what you said yesterday and would have continued to say had there not been objections from the defendants' lawyers? The objection came at a point where I was trying to explain the battles involved in writing my articles, in doing the National Public Radio commentaries and in writing the book — all from death row. In other words, the battle I had waged on my behalf to save my life and to try to share the reality of what life on death row meant.

But from the government's point of view, all men on death row are political pawns, they are tools to be used when politicians want to rise to a higher political office. It is demonstrable that for the last several years, during election time, the rapidity with which death warrants are signed increases apace. That is not to say that there aren't any signed when it's not election time but it points to the political nature of the death penalty and the political nature of who gets the death penalty and the political, race and class influences that determine who does not get the death penalty.

In America, indeed all over the world, the name OJ Simpson is known to millions if not billions by now. If his name were OJ Jamal or OJ Jackson or OJ Wright, he would have been on death row by now. No one can debate that. The fact that he was a wealthy person counts for more than that he was an African-American person.

The colour of power in the courtroom can often be white. And the colour of dispower in the courtroom can often be black. But the most consistent variable that determines power in the courtroom is the colour of green, the colour of money, the power of wealth. If he were not a full-time millionaire, he would have been on death row for well over nine months.

I'm not a wealthy person. I never have been. My wealth is in the love of the family I have — and now from people all over the world. And that is the only currency that I have. I could not afford the finest lawyers in America and I was trying to demonstrate to the court that accepting the contract to write *Live From Death Row* made a lot of things possible and one of them was hiring and paying for a very good lawyer like Leonard Weinglass and a staff of supporting and associate counsel to fight for my very life.

Could you tell us something about the new high-tech sensory deprivation experiments in the US and suggest to those subjected to such experiments some antidotes in terms of your own experience?

Well, the biggest antidote to this poison of sensory deprivation is not something that I can prescribe. It is an antidote that people must prescribe — individuals, everyone hearing this, everyone reading this — and that is to break the barrier of isolation erected by the state. What will prevail against this barrier of isolation is not so much what the prisoner does because that is a constantly shifting variable — but what the people do. And the people must mount a campaign of compassion, of life, of comradeship, of brotherhood and sisterhood to

let those militants, those political prisoners, those revolutionaries, those outlaws know that they are

a part of their hearts and their souls and their relationships. And that is the most important variable. There are internal things. I mean, I keep busy. I am reading everything. I even read what some people might consider trash. I read whatever I can get my hands on. I do all kinds of things to keep my mind alive, but it is a two-way stream.

As a veteran of the civil rights movement, I feel we badly need a perspective of our struggle in terms of our successive generations. I am half a generation older than you are and so I need to ask you, Mumia, what is it we did not do in terms of self-criticism, in terms of lack of discipline or resilience or simply in terms of not finishing the job so that you and so many fearless brothers and sisters are today? I know many of us faced murder and other soul-threatening types of pressure. But I am not referring here to the enemy, I am referring to ourselves. In other words, I feel our past weaknesses give us a historical responsibility to save you, to invent a new stage of an old unfinished struggle which must centre around you and the other prisoners. Can you help us think this through?

I would say this, Julia, that we both must admit to failures. Not simply you. And failures are generational and I share in them because many of my generation went so far and no further. In party lingo, we became "compartamentalists": we were people who studied the revolution ideologically, studied revolutions around the world, but we did that while we were at the office or while we were writing articles or while we were putting out press releases or while we were organising demonstrations. But what did we take home? And the essence of all social organisation begins at home. But because the fundamental social unit isn't happening, we didn't pass it on. And that is our failure, not yours. I join you in

that failure. What I've learned — as a revolutionary who came from that experience and then became exposed later in life to a new revolutionary experience, John Africa's revolution through the MOVE organisation (MOVE was a movement of mainly black squatters who occupied an inner city district in Philadelphia in the early eighties and who were bombarded on the orders of, ironically, the black mayor of the city at the time) — is that revolution is continuous and it does not stop; that every facet, every angle, every iota of your existence must become revolution.

Revolution must be your religion. Revolution must be your relationship. Revolution must be your love, your everything, your all. It must be total or be nothing. Because the system is so insidious that that one area, that one crack or vulnerability that does not possess a revolutionary element or content will be the area where this poison will invade and destroy and decay and corrupt that revolutionary vibration. Our children must be born in the aura of revolution. So that it becomes as natural to them as breathing.

If you look at those of us who are veterans from the '60s, who were in the Black Panther Party or the Revolutionary Action Movement or Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, some of us became academics, some of us became journalists, some of us became whatever we became. We became but we didn't pass it on. We spent our energy in this professional illusion without understanding that the essential truth, the essential element that is real, is revolution and that revolution must enmesh, feed and give life to every facet of our being or else we will fail.

The next Pan-African Congress will soon be convened. Is there anything you would like for the Pan-Africanist brothers to do for you?

I would thank them for even caring about me. I would say just to pass it on that the spirit of freedom, of human liberation cannot be held within one vessel. It is like holding air in a glass: the rest of the area around that glass is not a vacuum, it doesn't stop there. It's the same for the spirit of revolution: I am just one vessel. There are other vessels. Let's just keep pouring it on and pouring it on until it becomes the air that we all breathe.

I appreciate deeply: I have received quite a few communications, mostly from Francophone Africa and South Africa. I appreciate very deeply the expressions of love, warmth and camaraderie from the brothers and sisters on the African continent. It proves in a very real way that we are one people.

Mumia, take very good care of yourself. I am bringing your thoughts back to Paris where we must continue to work very hard to prevent you and the other political prisoners from being sealed off from the world. Thank you. It warms my heart. I am sorry we didn't meet in Rotterdam Prison because I put in a visit slip for you. But they didn't want us to meet.

Julia Wright is the daughter of the celebrated African-American writer, the late Richard Wright.

The colour of power in the courtroom can often be white. And the colour of dispower in the courtroom can often be black. But the most consistent variable that determines power in the courtroom is the colour of green, the colour of money, the power of wealth'

Steeped in ignorance

The creation, 30 years ago, of the discipline of African-American studies has ghettoised the black presence on US campuses, argues David Du Bois

Africa, Africans and peoples of African descent have been historically and are today the most maligned victims of Eurocentric education. That is why in the US the most vocal and persistent advocates of multiculturalism and diversity are African American. That is also why the demand for multiculturalism and diversity can be easily made to appear like advocacy of Afrocentricism and thus dismissed as calling for the replacement of Eurocentrism with Afrocentrism. And some among the advocates contribute to this distortion by asserting an Afrocentric superiority as a challenge to white or Eurocentric superiority.

The ignorance and the misinformation about Africa, Africans and peoples of African descent are vast. It is this ignorance and its promotion that makes possible the continuing cancer of white racism. Not a day passes when African Americans in the US are not confronted with some expression or manifestation of white racism. This reality is at the heart and soul of the demand for multiculturalism and diversity in education — from primary school through university and beyond. It is a demand for inclusive, comprehensive honesty in tracing and interpreting humankind's journey from its beginning. It is a warning that without multiculturalism and diversity, in theory and in practice, we are destined to continue down the road to a tragic race war that, in the final analysis, could spell doom for much of humankind.

Today college and university campuses across the US are awash in debate and heated controversy over the issues of diversity and multiculturalism. There is a demand to correct the Eurocentric bias of US education — to include in all the liberal arts disciplines the presence, the validity, the contributions and the critical perspectives of African, Asian, Latino and Native American realities. It is not a demand to replace Eurocentrism with Afrocentrism or to denigrate European culture. These charges against multiculturalism and diversity are deliberate attempts to distort, confuse and defame the advocates of multiculturalism and diversity by those determined to resist the inevitable.

This debate had its origins in the late 1960s when African American college and university students and teachers demanded increased black student enrolment, more black administrators and in-depth curriculum and textbook revisions to accurately reflect the African and African-American presence and contribu-

tion to American society. This was academia's contribution to the broader demands of the black urban community that characterised and drove the nationwide civil rights movement of the 1960s. The reply by establishment academia to the demand 30 years ago was a subterfuge that made the current controversy inevitable.

Tired of being ignored, lied about and humiliated as a people, black students and committed black teaching staff, with some white colleagues, threatened to disrupt university and college life across the country unless serious efforts were undertaken to guarantee that college and university students were provided with the truth about the role of African Americans in the making of America; the truth about the infamous slave trade and slavery in the US; the truth about African American contributions to agriculture, industry, science and technology, as well as the arts and sports; the truth about the African continent and its peoples, particularly the devastation caused by colonialism, imperialism and the slave trade; and the truth about Africa's interaction with and contributions to world civilisation from the earliest antiquity.

This movement was no less threatening to the established order than that of the black urban uprisings of the same period that burst forth out of the city ghettos, because it challenged the ideological foundations of alleged white European supremacy. And, because it accompanied the coming to political independence in

the 1960s of a succession of African nations, former colonies of European powers, with the entrance of their representatives onto the world's stage, resplendent in colourful, traditional robes of striking originality and beauty. Here African Americans were able to identify with what was significant black power globally, for the first time finding an obvious source of pride and hope in their African heritage.

Unable to justify the continued exclusion and distortion of the black presence in America and the world, and fearful of alliances beginning to develop between the angry, urban, ghetto-spawned, militant blacks and angry black academics and student organisations that had sprung up on college and university campuses across the country, black studies programmes and departments were hastily developed and instituted. On the surface it appeared a significant effort had been made to meet the demands initiated by black college and university students. But it soon became apparent to some that these efforts were programmed for failure.

Rather than undertaking the in-depth revision and correction of textbooks, syllabi and the total reorganisation of liberal arts disciplines to accurately reflect the number of African American students in all departments and institutions of higher learning, the response to black demands in the late 1960s concentrated on creating African American studies departments and programmes

— directed toward the black student community rather than toward the academic community as a whole. As a result these departments and programmes rapidly became "ghettos" for the black presence on campus, operating more as select, exclusive clubs than integral parts of the academic community.

In very much the same vein, there followed subsequently Latino studies, women's studies and, belatedly, Native American studies programmes. This creation of ethnic-based and women's departments and programmes included the establishment of non-classroom cultural and social facilities, in most cases exclusively for the members of the departments and programmes. These developments had the effect of defusing and weakening the central demand for a fundamental restructuring and revision of the content of the liberal arts disciplines of ancient, medieval and modern history, economics and political science, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, government, English and comparative literature, languages, the fine arts and the performing arts. They also provided grist to the mill of those who charged that mainstream white students were somehow being discriminated against. This was an effect much desired by those wishing to maintain the white, male, Eurocentric domination of academia.

Generally, the beneficiaries within the teaching staff and administration hailed these changes and, following their lead, students generally celebrated the creation of these programmes and departments, as did the academic community as a whole — albeit grudgingly. For black studies there was finally a recognition of their presence, with academic funds being spent to facilitate that presence. For these new black teaching staff and administrators there was new prestige, relatively good salaries and community status. And thus it was that the seeds of their own destruction were sown.

Little was done to revise or restructure academic materials and syllabi to reflect more accurately diversity and multiculturalism. Little was done to guarantee ethnic faculty representation in university departments other than those committed to ethnic studies. Attempts to increase black, Latino, Native American and Asian American student enrolment were in nearly all cases half-hearted and short-lived. These results made inevitable some 30 years later the emergence of the current debate and controversy over diversity and multiculturalism, now now confined to the university campus, but sweeping the nation's entire educational system.

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

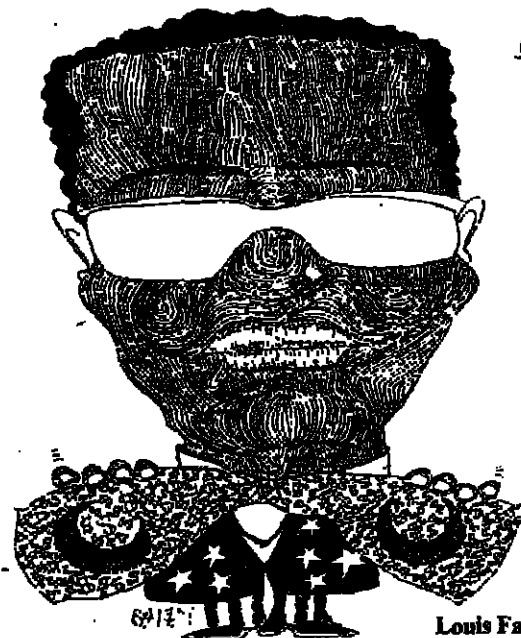
Faces of Black America



Malcolm X



Colin Powell



Louis Farrakhan

Al-Ahram Weekly

Let them eat cake

What can you do when bullets and threats have no effect on subduing a unruly population under occupation? Peres, it seems, has found the answer in border closures, denying Palestinians entry into Israel and rendering almost 90 per cent of the 250,000 workers in the West Bank and Gaza unemployed — starvation politics at its most disastrously effective.

Of course, politics can rarely be boldly stated. Therefore, he has masked his actions in the name of separating Israelis from Palestinians. But, this policy is, in short, little more than an extension of the Jim Crow laws implemented years ago in the US. In Peres' eyes, however, the three-week closure, which was recently extended indefinitely, is justified due to security concerns following the wave of Hamas bombings which claimed dozens of lives. Ever the pragmatist, Peres, conceding that the closures are harsh, urged the international community to assist the Palestinians through donations. After all, a clear conscience when tightening security arrangements is of paramount importance to Peres. So much so, in fact, that it may have crossed his mind, albeit for a second, to ease the restrictions. Politics, or more notably elections in May, rule the day. And already fighting to rid himself of his dovish image before a disenchanted and terrified population, he can ill afford to further alienate the already rowdy right wing.

But at a time when the peace process has reached a precarious point, especially on the Syrian-Israeli track, it would seem that this new-fangled policy is ill-timed. So, too, was Peres' decision to postpone discussions slated for next week on the status of refugees of the 1967 War. Yet, as a peacemaker, he insists that he is committed to securing a comprehensive peace with his Arab neighbours, all the time maintaining that peace begets more peace.

So what then will depriving an already-struggling population the most basic of needs such as medicine and gainful employment accomplish. Most likely, the result will be increased animosity and possibly peace, but only at the expense of more blood shed and the death of more innocent civilians.

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Tourism targets growth

Capitalising on tourist potential is one way of guaranteeing sustainable growth and combating unemployment, argues Ibrahim Nafie



that we seek to strengthen those industries that are most capable of generating a steady and uninterrupted flow of hard currency. Hence the importance of tourism, which is well placed to lead economic growth.

The tourist sector has distinct advantages over other potential growth industries. It is labour intensive. Each tourist booking into a hotel provides on average three employment opportunities. The bulk of those employed within the sector are young, recent graduates, i.e. those most seriously affected by unemployment.

Tourism's potential to act as the economy's driving force is not limited by production ceilings or quota restrictions. It cannot be depleted like oil reserves, nor can it be threatened

by down swings in the demand for labour abroad.

Tourism in Egypt began showing distinct signs of revival in 1994, largely as a result of the proactive marketing strategy promoted by the Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagi. Promotional teams were sent to the major tourist export countries in the West and Arab World. New markets in Africa and Asia were explored, and an intensive promotional campaign was launched using television, satellite channels, and all other available media. Egypt maintained a high profile at international tourist fairs and exhibitions, stressing its own internal security and stability, an image that was enhanced by hosting major international conferences such as the international population conference.

We are already reaping the benefits of such promotions. Tourist numbers visiting Egypt rose from 2.3 million in 1993-94 to 2.8 million in 1994-95, an increase of 20 per cent. Over the same period, the income generated from tourism rose from \$1,779.3 million to \$2,298.9 million.

These increases have coincided with a significant diversification of target source countries. While preserving its position in the traditional Arab markets — Egypt has witnessed a steady increase of tourists from the new markets of Asia and the Pacific. Indeed, it is Asia and the Pacific, particularly Japan and China, that have seen the largest relative increase in

the number of tourists coming to Egypt. There has also been a significant increase in the influx of tourists coming from Eastern Europe.

The government has been striving also to bolster the supply side of the industry. During the period 1993-95 some 200 separate tourist projects were approved by the Organisation for the Development of Tourism. The completion of these projects means that Egypt will have 87,000 hotel rooms. Consolidating this growth, the Higher Investment Organisation approved 80 new resort projects in a single session last January. By the year 2002, Egypt will have a total of 121,865 hotel rooms.

Yet, despite such expansion, there is much that remains to be done if Egypt is to fully capitalise on its potential within the international tourist market, and many sites remain that could be developed.

The new prime minister, Khaled El-Ganzouri, has placed the development of tourism high on the political agenda. His government has acted quickly to address three main areas. The first area pertains to attracting greater domestic and foreign investment, strengthening guarantees and incentives for investments. The second part of this strategy concerns enhancing and developing the infrastructure of new tourist zones, while the third prong relates to the diversification of tourism and the promotion of activity based resorts.

Thus, tourism can act as a powerful house for sustainable development.

Privatising the UN

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the problems facing the UN, which have come to the fore following Boutros-Ghali's announcement of his candidacy for a second term

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recently announced his intention to run for a second five-year term. Although he has in the past limited at such a possibility, it was thought this was more a tactical maneuver than a serious declaration of intent, a way of enhancing his credibility by dispelling the notion that the constraints placed upon him as a one-term secretary-general compromised his ability to act decisively. Now that he has announced his candidacy officially, the skeptics — and I admit to being one of them — have been proved wrong.

Boutros-Ghali is aware that a second term will be fraught with formidable challenges threatening the very viability of the UN in the post-bipolar world. In an article he wrote for the prestigious American review, *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1996), he notes that "Independence is the keystone of the secretary-general's mission." However, his ability to assert that independence is debatable, in the light of a recent statement by US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright, who noted that "in the past, UN secretaries-general have had some freedom of manoeuvre between the contending power blocs of the Cold War; that is now over and they should do what they are told."

In fact, the UN is one of the main arenas where the critical question of who will wield global leadership in the post-bipolar world will be resolved. Will it be the international "public sector", so to speak, as represented by the UN, or is it more likely to be, at a time everyone is advocating greater privatisation, the international "private sector", as represented by the US? And, if the latter scenario prevails, will the role and functions of the secretary-general correspond to his job description under the UN Charter?

As the sole remaining superpower, there is no denying that the US enjoys unparalleled clout on the world stage, that it is, indeed, at the pinnacle of the global decision-making process. It was US intervention that played the decisive role in ending

the Bosnian crisis which, before the US brought together the leaders of the warring factions to hammer out an agreement in Dayton, Ohio, had defied all attempts to resolve it.

It was also the US which played a decisive role in rescuing the Middle East peace process from near-collapse following a series of daring terrorist attacks in Israel for which Hamas claimed responsibility. The initiative for the international anti-terrorism summit held in Sharm El-Sheikh last week came not from the United Nations, but from US President Bill Clinton. These two examples graphically illustrate that when it comes to major international issues, decisions are taken not by the UN, but by the US.

In his *Foreign Affairs* article, Boutros-Ghali claims that the secretary-general is empowered to delegate international organisations, agencies and institutions to carry out specific missions as surrogates of the United Nations. That may well be, but NATO's mission in Bosnia, which was crucial in ending the crisis, was not undertaken under a mandate from the UN secretary-general, but in implementation of a decision by the US president. Before that, the European powers, led by France and Britain, had made many fruitless attempts to contain the Bosnian crisis, but it was only US intervention, in the form of sanctioning "air strikes" by NATO, that forced the parties to the negotiating table. Thus the secretary-general's claim comes across more as an attempt to save face than as an accurate reflection of the realities of the relationship between the UN and the US.

The UN is also in the throes of a grave financial crisis which has brought it to what Boutros-Ghali calls "the edge of insolvency".

Member states owe more than \$2.5 billion in unpaid dues; the US alone is \$1.6 billion in arrears, not to mention the \$1.7 billion it owes for peacekeeping. In the recent period, Boutros-Ghali has sought to find alternative sources of funding that would release the international organisation from its complete dependency on cash inflows from member states. One proposal has been to levy a stamp tax (say \$1) on every plane ticket sold, in addition to downsizing the UN budget and reducing bureaucratic expenses. But whatever the efforts in this direction, the main source of funding will remain the member states, led by the US, whose share is assessed at 25 per cent of total funding. As long as the situation remains unchanged, it is difficult to talk of the UN's independence from the US in this as in other areas.

A thesis developed by Boutros-Ghali in his article is that the post-Cold War world is in the grip of two opposing forces: globalisation and fragmentation. Both operate outside the parameters of state sovereignty, one by creating an increasingly interdependent world where national boundaries are less important, the other by leading people to seek refuge in smaller groups, sometimes at the expense of the integrity of the state. But sovereign states are still the cornerstone of the international system, and it is from them that the UN derives its legitimacy. With these states, which are also the sole source of financing for the UN, caught in a crossfire between the two forces, the US is better placed than the UN to address crisis situations worldwide.

As the process of fragmentation gains ground, regional conflicts are erupting with increasing frequency.

According to Boutros-Ghali, today's wars occur mainly within, not across, state borders. The irony is that the UN is being called upon to assume a heavier burden to deal with a proliferation of crises at a time its resources are dwindling and its authority undermined by the effective transfer of global leadership to the United States. Boutros-Ghali fears that the continuing disparity between responsibilities and resources would doom the UN to repeated failures and make it a scapegoat in the future.

The magnitude of delinquent dues reflects the reservations many member states now have about the return on their investment. Their reluctance to finance the organisation stems from a growing realisation that it is no longer the nerve-centre of the global decision-making process, now that it has lost the relative independence it enjoyed throughout the Cold War when it was the only forum which guaranteed an uninterrupted "global dialogue" and helped keep the hostility between the two world blocs from flaring into open conflict.

Coming as it does at a time when the UN is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, the incumbent secretary-general's re-election campaign will focus world attention on the potentially crippling problems besetting the organisation, and force the international community to engage in an open debate touching on the role of the UN in what is essentially a unipolar world order dominated by the sole remaining superpower.

It is difficult to predict Boutros-Ghali's chances of re-election, especially that he is not the candidate of choice for the US. The question is whether the rest of the international community is prepared to defy the US on this score and, by so doing, focus the spotlight on the ambiguity surrounding the UN, or whether everyone would prefer to keep the ambiguity in place rather than open Pandora's box of disturbing questions they are not yet ready to address.

The body politic

By Naguib Mahfouz

My generation was brought up in an atmosphere that was devoid of religious fanaticism. We were simply Egyptians, not Copts or Muslims.

I remember when the Egyptian cabinet consisted of only 12 ministers, and when two of those 12 were Copts. For many years Wassef Wassef, a Copt, served as parliamentary speaker. Indeed, he became a national hero when he led the protest against the closing of parliament by the former Prime Minister Sidki Pasha.

In those days Muslim candidates would stand in predominantly Coptic constituencies and vice versa. Ibrahim Pasha Farag once told me of an occasion when the Wafd Party nominated a Copt in a Delta constituency. The candidate requested a transfer to a predominantly Coptic district where he thought he would stand a better chance of winning. The leader of the Wafd at the time, Ibrahim Pasha El-Nahas, told him that his nomination to a Muslim district was a deliberate choice. "Nurturing political awareness is more important than winning," he said. Interestingly enough, the candidate in question did win.

In my youth the first real intimation of the religion of neighbours from the district would often occur when someone had died, and I found myself heading for a church to offer condolences. But even in death, Copts and Muslims observed very similar funeral rites. Some Copts held funeral processions while others erected pavilions to receive mourners.

Perhaps it is this atmosphere, which my generation imbibed, that makes it particularly painful for us to witness the growth of religious fanaticism. For us it is an alien phenomenon and any harm inflicted on our Coptic brothers is inflicted on us all.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Samir.

Towards a revolution in thought

The Arabs are trapped in history, writes Mustafa El-Fiqi. An obsession with the past prevails, while the present passes by

Nations which remain the captives of the past stagnate, incapable of progress, while those that neglect their heritage are apt to wander with no sense of direction. Only by striking a balance between the legacy of national history and a current vision for action is it possible to set a sound and judicious course for national life. Once the connection between past and present is severed, any attempt to think of a brighter future is bound to founder.

We — the Arab peoples — epitomise that uneasy relationship between past and present, between human beings and their contemporary environment, between thought and development. We have only to observe ourselves in relation to the world around us to discover how we stand in comparison to others. Here we may posit some pivotal issues that currently bog down Arab thinkers in past events and current predicaments, and prevent them from addressing the future.

First, we must summon the intellectual courage to admit that subjective factors govern our lives more than they do in other societies. Personalisation plays an active role in the constitution of networks based on subjective considerations which obstruct the process of natural selection whereby the fittest individual is chosen in each particular situation.

We cannot afford to avoid this crucial issue. We are experts at interpreting situations as best suits our individual whims and at bending the potential inherent in these situations toward our personal objectives. In fact, we go further. We are particularly adept at transforming private concerns into public issues and placing a secrete talent for obfuscation, distortion and subterfuge in the service of self-promotion.

Incidentally, we do not deny the right to individual aspirations, nor the right to work toward their fulfilment. In every society, there has always been a consensus granting the individual a margin of self-motivated pursuit. Yet when an individual's public interests revolve exclusively around the self-centered pursuit of his personal

ambitions, this implies not merely a character flaw, but, ultimately, a pathologically warped attitude toward society and public responsibility.

The Arab world at present is busy producing a cult of egotistic individualism and self-promotion which functions at every level of our lives — this is a climate that does not appear favourable to human rights and freedoms. We are confronted with the glaring discrepancy between the individual, who thrives on personal influence, and the other, forced to recoil.

Second, we are incapable, particularly in light of the heavy legacy of our past, of formulating a comprehensive overview of public issues. We are fascinated by the partial, short-term perspective. We belong to a long tradition in Arab culture of fertile imagination, broad vision and vast horizons. This should produce constructive thought and original conceptualisation, instead of the gamut of gut reactions, hand-me-down solutions and nit-picking we tend to resort to when confronted with new and unfamiliar problems.

Third, we have a severe case of national schizophrenia. We say one thing and do another, while denying that our actions ever took place. There is a profound rift between politics and culture, economics and society, those in power and those who have a vision. The result: misuse of power and poor distribution of wealth. Some blinkered or shortsighted thinkers believe that all we need to end our suffering are a few radical decisions and strict measures, as though a grander vision and the imposition of action are interchangeable. But true reform necessitates the political will of the public and a comprehensive philosophy grounded on firm intellectual traditions. Only this combination can produce a stable programme for reform that can be implemented according to clearly established phases.

Fourth, changing our perception of time is essential if we are to progress — to adapt to the terms of reference, features and developments of the contemporary world. Lacking awareness of the value of time and distancing ourselves from the course of contemporary events imposes a

form of isolation that totally severs us from a world where development is taking place at an astounding pace. The laws of inertia do not apply to human affairs. Today, either one swims against the flow and succeeds, or succumbs and is drawn under. In either case, it is impossible to remain at rest. In the global village, to live in isolation is impossible.

Fifth, we do not exploit our sense of patriotism and our sense of national duty in a constructive manner. Nationalism has been crucial to many nations in times of crisis. It was only effective, however, when popular sentiment was transformed into a dynamic force, channelled toward a goal, much as mass mobilisation can be channelled toward comprehensive development, or as national suffering can inspire people to pause and reassess their situation, summon their forces and push toward progress. Great modern nations were forged by intense pain and suffering, but only because they did not succumb to despair and indulge in self-pity and remorse. To perpetually dwell on mistakes without redressing them and to hark on drawbacks without attempting to overcome them only accustoms us to a sense of inferiority and apathy in time of crisis.

If the above outlines the mental and emotional framework that determines the relationship between our past, present and future, this is not to say that we should not revere our past or celebrate our history. But to dwell exclusively on bygone glories, which prevents us from coping with the present and deprives new generations of the right to prepare for the future, is an Arab affliction of the first order. So engrossed are we in singing the praises of the past that we are unable to contend with the world around us, let alone plan for a better future. Our obsession with our legacy has become a self-defence mechanism, a deterrent against new ideas and original ways of thinking. The intellectual constraints we impose on ourselves are not so different from the tariff barriers meant to protect the national economy from foreign competition. Meanwhile, however,

the world is drawing closer, national boundaries are vanishing, cultures are blending and the true cosmopolitan — the "world citizen" — is increasingly becoming a perceptible reality. The dynamics of history must be understood; the concept of evolution grasped; if the causal relation between past and future is to have meaning. History does not repeat itself; evolution does not proceed along a steady, predictable course. The conspiratorial interpretation of history is not always correct, nor is the past an adequate standard by which to judge the present, in an age of tremendous, sweeping changes.

The tension between the desire to dwell on the past and the need to elaborate a vision for the future brings us to a major issue: the inalienable right of human beings to exercise their inherent talents for free imagination, boundless creativity and theoretical conceptualisation. The differences between us, as individuals and societies, lie in the scope and depth of our inspiration for the future. The greatest human ideas and philosophies were conceived in the imagination of their creators, then crystallised in an enduring vision.

Each individual possesses the capacity to think freely, regardless of the extent to which individual liberties and freedom of opinion are restricted. Only through free thought does humanity fulfil its inherent right to overcome arbitrary restraints and to generate an enlightened vision, even in the face of intimidation and oppression. Other nations have struggled along this difficult road before us. Their success is the fruit of respect for the intellect, veneration of ideas and a devotion to freedom. These represent the spirit of a new age, toward which we must strive if we are to cross the bridge which lies between the horrors of the past and dreams for a brighter future.

The author is Egypt's ambassador to Austria, Slovakia and Slovenia and its permanent representative at international organisations in Vienna.

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د. مصطفى الفقي

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Thick walls, thin air

Israel, aided and abetted by the US, is gradually disappearing behind an isolating wall that will eventually separate it from its neighbours. And while this wall may not prove as solid as that constructed in Berlin, it is no less concrete, pieced together by means of security measures, latent pathological fears, and the brutal humiliation inflicted daily on tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

In constructing this wall Israel depends on American handouts, and on the continued renewal of military and intelligence accords, which serve only to widen the gap between the Jewish and neighbouring Arab populations, particularly the Palestinians. If Israel continues in such a manner it will gradually turn into a fortress, its survival dependent on its ability to terrify its neighbours rather than on inspiring goodwill and confidence.

Since the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli Oslo agreements, the conflict in the Middle East has shifted away from a military confrontation between two sides, each intent on destroying the other. It has evolved into a confrontation between two parties to a peace process, who both purport to believe that a just settlement is sufficient to end the conflict. Yet there are those who, rather than seeking an equitable rapprochement through cooperation, believe that a solution to the conflict can only be achieved by forcing opponents to surrender to their will, i.e. by rejecting them politically, economically and socially.

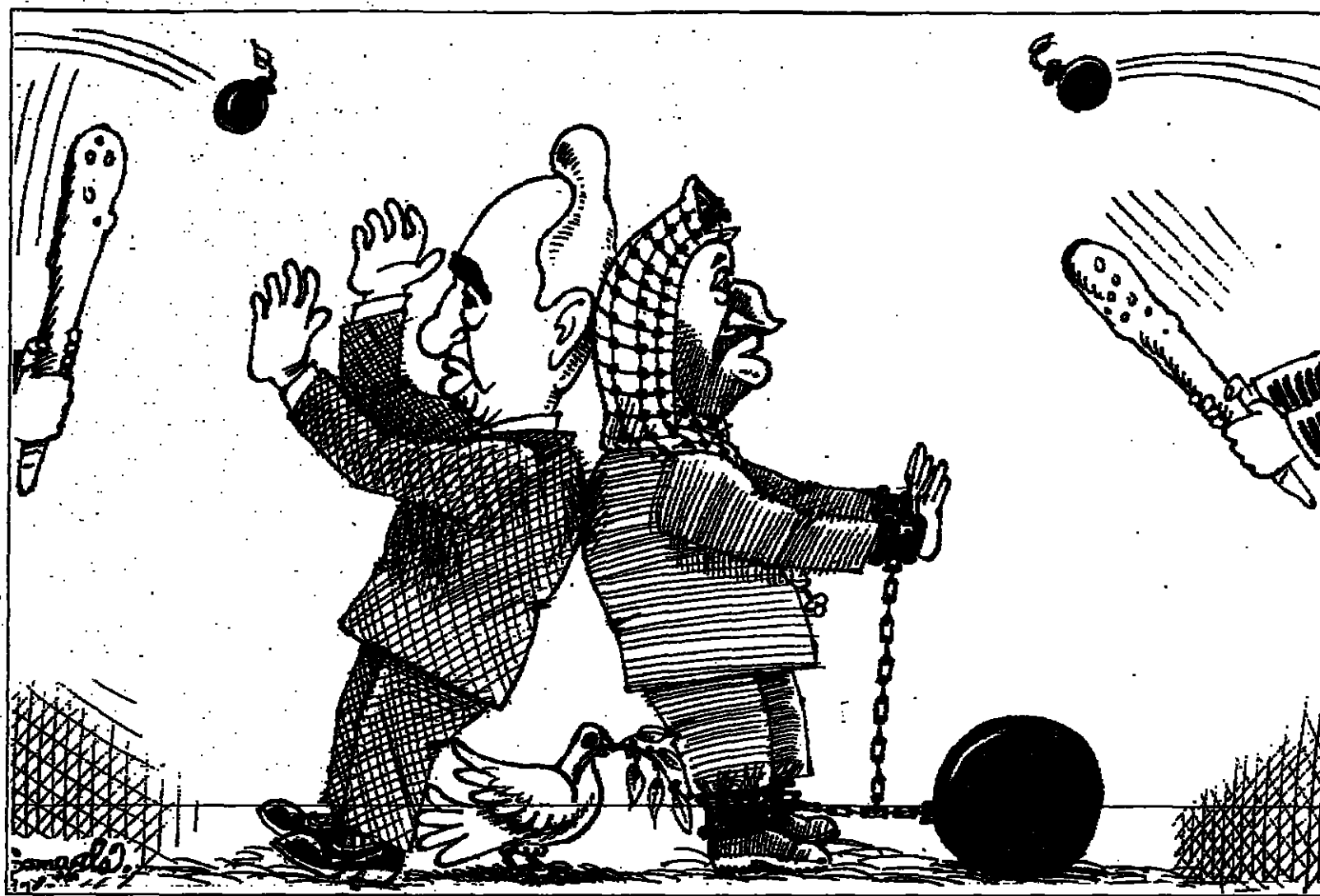
Forces opposed to the peace process have emerged with equal force among Palestinians and within Israel. It is a fact, though, that the Israeli reactionists are both more organised and extreme.

Thus it was that, immediately after the Hebron massacre, in which 30 Palestinians were murdered, the US and the international community endeavoured to appease the Palestinians and convince them of the necessity of persevering in negotiations. The US refused to censure the issuing of a Security Council resolution condemning Israel and guaranteeing the protection of Palestinians from settler attacks. The US position has remained unchanged, and was unaffected by the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

How different was the American response to the recent suicide attacks that took place within Israel. The main impulse behind the Sharm El-Sheikh summit — at least as far as the US and Israel were concerned — was to protect Israel, and only Israel, from the violence and terrorism of the Palestinian resistance. Israel was to be supplied with the financial, security and military ability to subject large sections of the Palestinian population, indeed the Palestinian population as a whole, to fierce punitive measures. These have ranged from the closure of Gaza and the West Bank and the indiscriminate arrests of hundreds of Palestinians to compelling the Palestinian National Authority to act as a gendarme, working for the Israeli security bodies.

And what has been the outcome of these measures? Negotiations on all tracks have come to an end, and the US has suspended its assistance to the PNA. In other words, the logic of revenge has overcome the logic of peace. Yet at this interim stage in the peace process it is inevitable that violent acts from both sides are likely to occur. There are bound to be victims.

How does the future look in light of sudden developments of this nature? Certainly the Israeli people will become more alienated and isolated from Arabs and Palestinians, and vice versa. And for Israel, erected with the help of the US, will increasingly antagonise the Arabs as it becomes a symbol of their humiliation. As for Peres's dream of a new Middle East, it will simply evaporate into thin air.



War on 'Islamic terror'

Without developing an alternative vision Arabs will be faced with the choice of either entering the American fold, or of being branded with a terrorist-fundamentalist identity, argues **Edward Said**

At a moment of considerable Anglo-Indian tension in 1926, the British missionary and intellectual Edward Thompson (father of EP Thompson, the great historian of the British working-class movement) published *The Other Side of the Medal*, a small book that dealt very critically with British colonial policy in India. One of the points he made in his eloquently anti-imperialist tract is that writings about India in English — even in so authoritative a source as the *Oxford History of India* — simply left out the Indian side of things; this Thompson says, further deepens the incomprehension between Indians and the British and makes unlikely any hope of reconciliation and understanding between the two sides.

Most British historians of India, for example, described the famous "Mutiny" of 1857 as a barbarous, terrorist attack on defenceless women and children, thereby converting the Indian into a savage barbarian to whom the only response was force. Thompson points out that for Indians the "Mutiny" was in fact an event in their struggle against the British, provoked by generations of punishing colonisation, racist discrimination and savage imperial repression of Indian independence.

What was unusual about Thompson's book, however, is that he was one of the first to grasp that when great political and military power is translated into language that misrepresents the weak and the oppressed — as in "official" histories or declarations — even so relatively innocuous a thing as language can have a tremendously wounding effect on the object of description.

"Our misrepresentation of Indian history and character is one of the things that have so alienated the educated classes of India that even their moderate elements have refused to help the Reforms [of colonial policy]. Those measures, because of this silliness, have failed, when they deserved a better fate," writes Thompson.

Change Thompson's context and time, substitute "peace process" for "Reforms", Palestinians and Arabs for Indians, and Israelis for British, and you have an accurate account of the present impasse. Great, deliberately bloody and indiscriminate violence acts like the 1957 Mutiny or the recent bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are ugly, indefensible things; they sacrifice the lives of Israelis and Palestinians as they did Indians and Europeans; they induce more hatred and feelings of revenge; and, for the stronger party, they inevitably produce savage retaliation against the whole population of Palestinians. "Kill the Arabs," was a frequently heard refrain among ordinary Israelis, much as "Kill the Indians" was the chorus of 1857.

The bombs that killed 60 Israelis were morally repulsive, quite aside from the fact that they were strategically unproductive. Cynical manipulations of religion are appealing: to kill children or bus passengers in the name of God is a horror to be unconditionally condemned, as much as one should also condemn leaders who send young people on suicide missions. But there has been little more obdurate and arrogant than the Israeli and American response, with its sanctimonious choruses against terrorism, Hamas, Islamic fundamentalism, and its equally odious hymns to peace-making, the peace process, and the peace of the brave.

To top it all, the grotesque display of bad faith, graceless posturing, and for Clinton and Peres, brazen electioneering that dominated the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, simply made the contradictions even more glaring. Here were Israel and the US, whose military record of colonial behaviour in the post-war world is virtually unrivalled for its lack of remorse, wrapping themselves in the mantle of moralism and self-congratulation, even as lumbering figures like Boris Yeltsin — who has been terrorising Muslim Chechnyas for several years — were allowed to draw down some of the event's counterfactual aura for themselves.

The fact is that the peace process has been an offence to the Palestinian spirit. Each declaration of its virtue, each resounding compliment paid to it, each parade and celebratory event has reminded Palestinians of how their history as the native inhabitants of Palestine were deliberately kicked off their own land, their society destroyed, the West Bank and Gaza kept under military occupation for 29 years, has been ignored, violated, misrepresented. Terrorism is bred out of poverty, desperation, a sense of powerlessness and utter misery: it signals the failure of politics and vision. On the other hand Israel has behaved with no understanding or magnanimity at all. It has conducted open war against the very same people it now appears to be making peace with; it has violated even the niggling provisions of the Oslo Accords; and it has shown its open contempt for Palestinian society and its leaders, not only by pretending that the Palestinian presence in Palestine never existed, but by continuing to intervene in Palestinian life, assassinating leaders at will, using its military might to destroy homes, shut schools, arrest and deport anyone it feels is a "threat" to its "security". It is simply extraordinary, and without precedent, that Israel's history, its record — from the fact that it introduced terrorism against civilians to the Middle East, that it is a state built on conquest, that it has invaded surrounding countries, bombed and destroyed at will, to the fact that it currently occupies Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian territory against international law — is simply never cited, never subjected to scrutiny in the US media or in official discourse (by Clinton and Christopher most notably), never addressed as playing any role at all in provoking "Islamic terror".

What has made the events of the past few

weeks even more dreadful is that Israel and the US, deliberately using the weapons of mass media, psychological warfare, and political pressure, have also been leading a campaign against Islam (with Iran as its main agent) as the origin of terror and "fundamentalism". Consider the background. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been an active, explicit search in the US for new official enemies, a search which has now come to settle on "Islam" as a manufactured opponent. True there are ancient rivalries between the West and Islam, and there has been a massive amount of rhetoric in the Islamic, especially Arab, world against the West, plus a whole array of parties, leaders, and ideological trends for whom the Great Satan, the West's repulsive embodiment, is the US. In addition, recent bloodshed in Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, in which one source of conflict is a brutalising manipulation of religion, has totally corrupted the Arab world's civil life.

But this has to be seen along with the long history of imperial Western intervention in the Islamic world, the continued assault upon its culture and traditions as a standard feature of academic and popular discourse, and (perhaps most important) the frank disdain with which the wishes and aspirations of Muslims, and particularly Arabs, are treated. There are now American and Israeli armies settled on Arab soil, but not Arab or Muslim armies in the West; few Arabs or Muslims in the West feel like anything except hated terrorists. Official Israeli discourse has taken advantage of all this. During the 1970s it was a staple of Israeli foreign affairs jargon that Palestinians were always to be identified with terrorism. Now, in the same cynical and calculated manner, both Israel and the US identify fundamentalist Islam — a label that is often compressed into the one word "Islam" — with opposition to the peace process, to Western interests, to democracy and to Western civilisation.

I do not want to be understood as saying that all this amounts to a conspiracy, although I do think that there is active collusion between Israel and the US in terms of planning, conceptualisation, and now, since Sharm El-Sheikh, grand strategy. What they both want is compliance. In effect they want an Islamic and Arab world that has simply resigned itself to the dictates of the Pax Americana-Israelica. In my opinion one can only obey such dictates as these: one cannot have a dialogue with them, since according to their most basic underlying premise, the grand strategy regards Muslims and Arabs as fundamentally delinquent. Only when Muslims totally fall into line, speak the same language, take the same measures as Israel and the US, can they be expected to be "normal", at which point of course they are no longer really Arab and Muslim. They have simply be-

come "peacemakers". What a pity that so noble an idea as "peace" has become a corrupted embellishment of power masquerading as reconciliation.

The evidence for the existence of such a grand strategy is compelling. In 1991 the *Washington Post* leaked news of a continuing study in the US defence and intelligence establishment of the need to find a new common enemy: Islam was the candidate. Many of the authoritative foreign policy journals, seminars and newspapers of record have held symposia, published articles and studies proclaiming the threat of Islam. Judith Miller, among several others, is one of the leaders of the journalistic effort. Samuel Huntington's famous article on the clash of civilisations put forward the much-debated thesis that certain civilisations are incompatible with the West. Islamic civilisation (sometimes in alliance with Confucian culture, an extremely quaint idea) being the central instance. What hasn't been noted about Huntington's article is that its title came from Bernard Lewis, and that most of its pages are in fact devoted to Islam as a Western enemy. Finally, the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, has made Islam the preferred candidate for demon status in that study; both Jewish and Christian, to say nothing of Slavic or Hindu fundamentalism get very little attention in comparison. By now the media equates Islam with terror and fundamentalism, so that no matter where a bomb goes off in the world, the first suspects are always Muslim and/or Arab.

What I have described is only part of the phenomenon. There are not only newsletters, clubs, continuing seminars in the most unlikely places devoted exclusively to Islam — the word itself has acquired the bristling status of a frightening, irrational monster — politics and activities. Every article published about Hamas or Islamic fundamentalism or Iran — about which it is now impossible to speak rationally — describes an ahistorical world of pure despotism, pure rage, pure violence, all of it in some way targeting "us", a group of innocent victims who happen to ride buses or go about some harmless daily business, unconnected with the decades of suffering imposed on an entire people.

There is never an indication at all that for centuries there has been one form or another of Western infringement directed against the land and peoples of Islam. Long articles by instant experts create the impression that Hamas flourishes gratuitously or because of Iran or for no other ascertainable reason at all, except to attack Jews and the West. Few of those who fulminate against terrorism mention the occupation, or the constant attacks on Arabs and Muslims.

A few days ago the veteran French journalist Eric Rouleau appeared on a national discussion TV programme with the former

head of the CIA, James Woolsey, and Geoffrey Kemp, a so-called "terrorism expert". Kemp and Woolsey were asked by the moderator about the Sharm El-Sheikh summit and both spoke with great effectiveness and enthusiasm about its value; Rouleau tried three times to explain the "context" that produced Hamas, but the moderator never gave him a chance to say a word. All anyone wanted was proof that "we" were opposing Islamic terrorism and feeling good about it. Moreover no one bothered to point out that Hamas's quarrel with the "peace process" has from the beginning been advanced on nationalist, never on Islamic, principles. Thus Huntington's thesis, which in my opinion, amounts to a blanket declaration of war against all civilisations that do not conform to Western values, is now being put into effect.

The worst aspect of all this is that US-Israeli strategy seeks to turn Arab governments into collaborators in the effort against an ever increasing number of their own people. I am not sure how many are conscious of what is happening, but I am certain it is happening. On a popular level, the policy threatens to rob us of our memory and of our past, so that we will be faced either with the choice of coming into the American fold, which humbly offers very little (the terribly compromised peace process is an excellent instance of one reward), or of remaining outside, stripped of everything except the terrorist-fundamentalist identity and therefore subject to intimidation, boycott, and perhaps even extermination. In my opinion this is what makes the efforts of groups like Hamas so futile, since, they offer no real resistance to the whole plan I have been describing, although they do in effect cause the collective punishment that jeopardises the interests of the majority of the people.

Peace and dialogue can only occur between equals. The general condition of the Arab world has never been weaker and more mediocre: we have no institutions, no science, no coordination, no counter-strategy. Most people are now indifferent or despondent. The rise of Islamic militancy is a symptom of how deplorable things are. Yet there is no short road, no easy fix for our present predicament. It falls once again to intellectuals and men and women of conscience to speak rationally of what is really before us as a people. We must avoid easy formulas, and misleading displays, which make hypocrites of all of us. Analysis, dedication, and a decent, realisable vision: that is what we need to build ourselves up to a position where we can truly engage in dialogue, where we can really show those who speak for the West and Israel that we cannot tolerate our present status either as angry religious terrorists, or as compliant Red Indians.

Soapbox

Grassroots consciousness

Community participation is most effective when it is practiced collectively, through various social and political structures. And these days NGOs are increasingly recognised as being among the most important vehicles for such participation. Nor are women's NGOs an exception to this general rule.

Advocates of gender equality have come to view NGOs as an effective channel through which to organise women at a grassroots level and implement relevant empowerment strategies.

Since the 1980s governments and funding agencies have acknowledged the role of NGOs in general, and women's NGOs in particular, as partners in the development process.

Behind the recent enthusiasm for women's NGOs within development circles lies the limited success of earlier efforts to engender public institutions and their policies through a top down approach. The success of the NGOs' bottom up mobilisation strategy emerged as a far more successful strategy.

Grassroots NGOs in Egypt have often been criticised as adopting a welfare approach to women's problems. Yet in the process of carrying out welfare-oriented programmes, a space is created for increasing awareness, for consciousness-raising and for organisational capacity building. Women learn to question their social position and start organising and networking to combat discriminatory practices.

The experience of Egyptian NGOs in preparing for the Beijing Women's conference is worth mentioning. With the Alliance for Arab Women (AAW) as a co-ordinator for the NGOs, a structure was established that now incorporates 900 NGOs, with a board comprising representatives from the 26 governorates of Egypt. And it is the AAW, alongside other agencies, that is helping in the formulation of a programme of action to follow up on the recommendations of the Beijing conference.

This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of community organisation at Helwan University.



Hoda Badran

Reflections By Hanif Shukrallah

During the past two weeks there has been a strong scent of the Gulf War in the air. Sabres were rattled, drums beaten, and Bill Clinton, head of the most powerful state in history, was suddenly declaring war in the banner headlines of the world's press, alongside Shimon Peres, head of the Middle East's sole nuclear super-power.

Meanwhile, in a supreme example of the Hegel/Marx "tragedy-repeated-as-farce" proposition, Margaret Thatcher was in the US delivering a second Fulton speech. Echoing Winston Churchill's "iron curtain" speech delivered in the same place 50 years before, Thatcher's war cry was not directed against a triumphant Soviet Union, whose armies had just felled Nazi Germany and occupied Berlin. The threat to the Western world was now "rogue states" and "Islamic radicalism", the likes of Hamas and Jihad, Iran, Libya, and "bombed-back-to-the-Middle-Ages" Iraq.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, armed to the teeth, beating his chest while threatening a six-year-old armed with only a makeshift stick is a scene best suited for a "20s slapstick comedy". During the past two weeks, however, no one was smiling as the Western and Israeli media revelled in the excitement and awe that declaration of war banners still strike in the hearts of their public. And, as no doubt Clinton's and Peres'

campaign managers were well aware, declarations of war, especially against easily thrashable enemies, of the Argentine generals, Saddam/Gaddafi/Hamas variety, win votes.

In *Detering Democracy*, published soon after the Gulf War, Noam Chomsky provided tremendous and extremely well documented evidence for the fabrication of the "Soviet threat" during the post World War II era. In doing so he exposed a mechanism that we have seen in operation over and over again. The attempts by the chosen enemy to seek a middle ground are consistently blocked. He is backed further and further against the wall. And when he has no alternative but to lash out, his reaction is used as the pretext for stirring up hatred and warmongering.

Saddam Hussein's armies were routed in a few days. The rest of what counted as the Gulf War, ridiculously hailed by Saddam and his supporters as steadfastness, was merely the US and its allies bombing Iraq back to the Middle Ages, testing new weapons, minimising potential losses, and generally having a good time at the expense of their oil-rich Gulf hosts. Iran, which fought a ten-year plodding, all-out war against Saddam's same armies, should prove no more a threat than he did. And what about Hamas and Islamic Jihad? How many cadres are we talking about: 10, 20, even 30 thousand, without benefit of state or armies, and hunted

by the repressive machinery of most of the region's, and the world's, states?

Of course, Western and Israeli leaders, despite all their protestations that the enemy is not Islam and Muslims, are well aware of the fact that their war cries and sabre rattling would appear patently silly had their public not been responding to the image of an over-all Islamic threat. After all, we did not hear anyone calling for a global war against the far American right, at the time of the Oklahoma bombing, or for a battle to end all battles against the Israeli right, at the time of the Baruch Goldstein massacre, or even Rabin's assassination.

A recent editorial in *The Jerusalem Post* (7 March 1996) is quite revealing. "It is a grave error," the editorial tells us, "to underestimate the passion, dedication and convictions of those ready to sacrifice their lives for their cause." It then goes on: "To Westerners this cause is monstrous and revolting, and the promise of instant paradise where 72 noble women cater to the martyr's every wish seems less than pristine idealism. But the willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice is there, and the havoc it can create is staggering. What Israel and the Western world are facing is not a tiny group of bums, but a powerful movement with mass appeal."

The bare-faced racism in the above should be obvious to anyone not totally blinded by racism. I find it equal-

ly fascinating that supposedly "intellectual" Israelis could discourse with such facility about "monstrous causes", while thousands of their fellow citizens are chanting in the streets: "Kill the Arabs" and "Baruch Goldstein, there's no one like you in the world".

What is most revealing about the editorial's assertions, however, is their normative nature. They do not shock or surprise; they have been said, in different ways, thousands of times before. Israel and the West — a single entity, which, Hitler and Goldstein notwithstanding, can be made aghast by monstrosity of any kind — are faced with the "staggering" danger of a "powerful" movement, embracing a "monstrous" cause. Neither the cause, nor the movement, need explaining save by reference to a supposedly inherent cultural/religious identity.

The vulgarity and blatant racism of *The Jerusalem Post's* editors — flouting the image of the sex-mad Arabs who would go to the extent of committing suicide for the sake of the ministrations of noble women in the hereafter — is not an absolutely necessary corollary to this normative assertion. It could be, and often has been, put in less, dare I say it, "revolting" ways.

The threat, the enemy, is the real point of the exercise.

Banging the drums of war

The colours of revolt

"As a child I loved my colour crayons, as a teenager I always did what I wanted, as a woman I felt my body was my own, and I was always considered a rebel."

So said Gabbia Sirry in an interview with Lillian Karanik, reported in *Contemporary Egyptian Art*. And the results of that continuing life-long rebellion can be viewed until the 10 April at The Centre of Arts, Zamalek, where Sirry is the subject of a three week retrospective.

Time and Place, 1951-1996, spans the painter's career to date, beginning with her early schematic paintings, with their implied social commentaries, and ending with her later, more expressionist works, where the carefully constructed, formal balance of the canvases is often disrupted by the presence of figures scratched into the surface of the pigment.

Umm Antar, right, is included in the retrospective, which draws on both private and public holdings of Sirry's work.

For details of *Time and Place, 1951-1996*, see Listings opposite



Voice over content

David Blake watches the body parts of pop withstanding the storm

Cairo Symphony Orchestra (Pops 3), conductor Charles Ansbacher, Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 16 March

Pops has a long lineage. In this century such concerts began in London under the Proms concert creator Henry Wood. Later, before 1914, a series of Lolly Pop concerts were given to full audiences. Later still Wilhelm Furtwangler, one of the twentieth century's gods of conducting, loved to play the occasional pop concert. Charles Ansbacher is welcome. His concert with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra carried on a tradition of giving the big public the popular stuff it loves.

It is a tradition, though, that cuts both ways. It hints that music is elitist, that there is some suited to the people, but yet more that they will never understand. But this is a limp truth. Mahler can fill the main hall of Cairo Opera, which last night, for the supposedly crowd pulling popular stuff, was half empty. This was a pity because Ansbacher's management of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra was more than shiny and brilliant, it was warm and merry. Yet apart from the deserved clamour for encores which came at the end, there were only eight pieces given. What is this music? How did it come about? As Ansbacher said in his clear diction, when he spoke briefly about the pieces chosen, it all began in Vienna when the flood of emotion, beginning with classical music, burst all barriers. Some of it became opera, and the Blue Danube was born. The central Eu-

ropean river led through Stolz and all his whirling Brotherhood until it became the American musical. On the way came *The Lilac Domino*, *The Merry Widow*. The line went straight into Rio Rita and the really gorgeous music of *Roberta* and *Show Boat*. By the time Kurt Weill moved from Berlin to America, pop had become really classy, borrowing openly from Richard Strauss and Duke Ellington. Rich, dark orchestration and elaborate long-lined tunes of great originality appeared, with nothing to do with the classical idiom. Cole Porter, and Gershwin in *Porgy and Bess*, took music to new areas. Jerome Kern's genius for form spread the web of pop even further. It was a seething world. All these musicians were highly sophisticated people. They merely bent their music a little way towards the wind that was blowing up from the streets and byways of the great cities of the world. We still flounder about in the resulting aftermath which has taken music almost into the new millennium. And pop began it all. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra exhibited both understanding and feeling for these revolutionary changes and upsets that have knocked the classical music that specialize in off its pedestal. So who listens to this halfway stuff? Well, music is for everyone, no matter the form. And now it is so multi-faceted that there must be something for everyone. At the centre of this concert's exciting

chaos was the *Sound of Music*. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra gave it all to this verdant oldie. You can always hear the soprano of Julie Andrews when it starts rolling. So much for the power of voice over content. But the content of the *Sound of Music* is fully loaded, as Cairo Symphony Orchestra proved. The notes existed before they opened Pandora's box, and besides, those who listen to middle generation pop of yesteryear are the people who already had shelter from the street storm. Ansbacher offered well padded music for a comfortable audience. Sousa, who opened the box, evokes great sadness in spite of the panoply of wide-eyed and lovingly listening to Rodgers and Hammerstein knows the answer. Rimsky-Korsakov, writing from the other side of Pandora's explosion, comes to the same conclusion but in quicker time. Johann Strauss, eldest of the wildly whirling Brothers, had the power and the paint to dance his way over the upheaval. Bizet was too sensitive to join the scrub but the scent of change clung to him and his music. And then came Rodgers and Hammerstein — the golden mean of the wide-eyed mothers. Their music holds on to everyone's emotions because it is bright, brilliant and true. They were anchored in old Vienna these Hammersteins, where musical goods were hand turned not machine made. Andrew Lloyd Webber and The Phan-

tom. He writes the loveliest bits of tunes. He is the foolish virgin. He has the lamp, the flame and the oil but no one has ever shown him how to bring them together. His music attempts to make up in sheer noise for what it lacks in content. The American patrol piece was full of instrumental changes. Inas Abdel-Dayem, in her position far up in the orchestra, swayed free and joyful to the rhythms which all evening had suited her style. She is expansive. To Leonard Bernstein. *West Side Story* is the beginning of the end of the road for pop. This composer, like Gershwin, knew everything. He is elemental and instinctive. Mistakes? There are none — too cute for error, he smashes in with such gusto that the bravado of the attack drives the wind away. When does the opera become a musical and the musical an opera? The question is wide open in *West Side Story*. Yet still it clings lovingly to opera and, as time goes on, will become more than opera. Already, with other music of its type, it is a bridge leading to somewhere. The "where" is what we are all waiting for. Pop too has solidified already into the museums. What is pop? What is classic? They are both one and the same. My favourite music, said Cage, is Wagner scrambled, Ellington straight, and Beethoven fresh from the streets. Someday the new pop will come and someone will give Cairo a concert of the master Ellington's own music. Until then this one did very nicely.

By fortunate coincidence the American University in Cairo last week invited David Carroll, professor of English literature at the University of Lancaster, to lecture on the writings of the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, while on the same day Ahdaf Soueif, an Egyptian novelist writing in English, was discussing her own works.

Expecting the speakers to be drawn into the exhausted subject raised by the spectacle of a body of literature produced in the coloniser's language, it was a welcome surprise to find Carroll and Soueif straying from what has become established as the norm in discussions of post-coloniality, choosing instead to delve into the complexities of the works in question.

It did not prove difficult to side-step the issue of writing in the language of the other, which, time and again, was signalled by the authors not as a submission to the other but as an exercise in playing upon the tensions generated in the linguistic space between two languages. With Soueif, the discussion moved from appeals from the audience for enlightenment on the enigmatic characters in *In the Eye of the Sun*, through reactions to the heroine and queries about her motivations, to comments upon the intrusion of voices in *Aisha* and *In the Eye of the Sun*. Questions on the texture of the language aimed at elucidating the reception of an Arabic-textured novel by an English audience, departing

In giving voice

Chinua Achebe's handling of stereotypes posited by colonial literature reveals their obverse. Ahdaf Soueif's writings emerge from an Arab consciousness. Tahia Abdel-Nasser attends two lectures

from the usual antagonism, directed at the motivation of authors writing in a language other than their mother tongue. In portraying an Egyptian reality through a manipulation of the English language — necessitated by the intervention of a distinctly Arab consciousness — Soueif punctuates her novel with historical events, from May 1967 to April 1980, which are interwoven with the heroine's personal experiences. The novel comes to rest at an apocalyptic point in the history of the Arab world and its final image offers the heroine in an act of contemplation. In an Egyptian village, she examines a buried idol that, delivered back to the sunlight, is still in possession of a smile, serene, yet sinister.

Carroll, too, spoke of apocalypses, of the collapse of traditional Ibo society in the face of a new religion and government. Achebe's apocalypse creeps like the rough beast slouching "towards Bethlehem to be born". And it is from W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming* that Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), takes its title. The novel traces the integration of a traditional state

of existence traced through the tension between individual and communal values, dramatized by episodes such as the hero's suppression of personal reality in order to obey the dictates of inscrutable divinities, the eclipse of his popularity for persisting in imposing an implacable will upon the tribe and the arrival of missionaries in his community. Beginning with Achebe's beginnings — Marlow's search for Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* — Carroll traced Achebe's deflation of the stereotype posited by Conrad. Deflating the stereotype meant not merely using a tool of oppression, the coloniser's language, as an instrument of resistance but subjecting it to a familiar linguistic texture and laying bare the coloniser's world of alien customs, rituals and values. Achebe does not only reclaim the story of the colonised, but reworks it from the coloniser's own version.

By telling the story of Ibo society at the time of the arrival of missionaries and the establishment of colonial government, *Things Fall Apart* redraws the obverse of the coin. The narrative voice, a tribal elder, drawing out the stages of

the growing estrangement between the hero and his clansmen, strives towards attaining the intelligibility whose possibility so unsettles Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. The colonised is given occasion to speak through the language of the coloniser and in doing so subverts the popularised stereotype.

The hero of *Things Fall Apart*, ruled by what Carroll called a "European single-mindedness", springing from his father's failure to acquire status, is locked in conflict with his easy-going clansmen. Driven by an obsessive need to succeed, and in the mean time suppressing his humanity, the hero faces both tribal disension and disruptive forces that threaten to collapse his world. His defiance of the alien religion introduced by the missionaries, who threaten to undermine his community's traditional values, assumes, Carroll posited, a grandeur enhanced by the point of view that appears to triumph at the end of the novel, if only by virtue of being placed in the concluding paragraph. Achebe invites the reader to share the viewpoint of a British district commissioner who wants to

write a book entitled *The Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* and in doing so, Carroll argues, successfully challenges the reader to apply the stereotype of Africa as "the heart of darkness of the European imagination, once more, if he [she] dare".

By the overturning of stereotypes and creating reversal post-colonial literature, produced by a former colonised subject, is itself a reversal, deconstructing the coloniser's verdict of incomprehensibility passed upon the colonised by speaking out in the coloniser's own language.

Achebe gives voice to the West's other, an African community, through English, the other of African languages. Ahdaf Soueif follows a similar strategy, producing her works in English while seeming, simultaneously, to work against a male-dominated literature. Although Soueif acknowledged having intervened in a male Arab canon, she confined the parallels, drawn by some of her audience, between *In the Eye of the Sun* and Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, to having been influenced by his novel which she read at an early age. Soueif went on to express her wish to have the Egyptian hero or heroine speak out to the western reader. It was such an intention that governed Achebe's revision of Conrad, by showing that African people too have a voice, and a human one.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Shawdhi Ezzat
Main Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 342 4494. Daily ex Fri. 11am-5pm. Until 21 March.

Dietrich Staehlin (Paintings)
Opera Art Gallery, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0398. Daily 10am-1pm & 4.30pm-8.30pm. Until 22 March.

International Students' Festival
El-Marsaf St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily ex Fri. 10am-3pm & 3.30pm. Until 27 March.

Renaud Gattuso (Sculpture)
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Shakh El-Marsaf St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily ex Fri. 10am-3pm & 3.30pm. Until 27 March.

Karl Otto Goss (Lithographs)
Goethe Institute, 3 Abdel-Salam Aref St. Downtown. Tel 779 4709. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 3pm-5pm. Until 27 March.

Cairo in Two Parts
Hassan Tharwat, Main Campus, AUC. El-Shakh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. 27 March, 6pm-9pm & 28 March 3pm-7pm.
A video showing by Paul Rinaldi, with music by Astor/Found, in response to some of the diverse rhythms and textures found in Cairo.

Suleiman El-Award
Al-Ahram Lobby, Al-Ahram Building, El-Ghiza St. Tel 5766100400. Daily 9am-5pm. Until the end of the month.
Under the title Kuwait Yesterday and Today, the architect-photographer exhibits walls highlighting the common between the country's past and present.

Adly Elmaghrabi (Aquarelle)
Ahdaf Soueif, 2 Karim El-Dawid St. Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily ex Fri. 10am-1pm & 3pm-10pm. Until 31 March.

Nazi Madhour (Paintings)
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6801. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 30 March.

Bernard Guillot (Paintings and Photographs)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssif El-Gundi St. Bab El-Lok. Tel 393 1764. Daily ex Sun. 12pm-5pm. Until 30 March.

Christopher Krommer (Paintings)
Ewert Gallery, Main Campus, AUC. El-Shakh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. Daily ex Fri. 9am-5pm. Until 30 March.
The Nigerian artist exhibits scenes from his homeland and Egypt.

Wassim Fahmy & Fathi Ahmed (Paintings)
Sawky Gallery, El-Nasim St. Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily ex Sun. 10.30am-2pm & 3pm-5pm. Until 6 April.

Gabbia Sirry (Paintings)
Alkhatoun Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 El-Masrah El-Suwayri St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily ex Fri. 10am-1.30pm & 3.30pm-5.30pm. Until 10 April.

Avad El-Ghaili
Main Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 378 4494. Daily ex Fri. 11am-5pm. Until 18 April.

Randa Shattah (Photographs)
Sawky Gallery, AUC, Main Campus. El-Shakh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. Daily ex Fri. 9am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 19 April.
Black and white portraits of outstanding individuals captured through the photographer's lens over the years.

Masraka Badawy
Jameel Centre Hall, Gezira Campus, AUC. El-Shakh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. Daily ex Fri & Sat. 8am-10pm. Until 20 April.
Photographs under the title The White Desert.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 El-Masrah El-Suwayri St. Zamalek. Tel 336 2576. Daily ex Mon. 10am-1pm & 7.30pm-10pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Manet and Rodin.

FILMS

Indian Films
Indian Cultural Centre, 23 Tolat Harbi St. Downtown. Tel 393 3396. April 21 March, 6pm.

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alay St. Heliopolis. Tel 417 4924.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Shakh El-Marsaf St. Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.

Libra, Amara Mia (I Am From, My Love), 24 March, 7pm.
Directed by M. Bologna (1975).

The Magpie (The French)
Wib, 24 March, 6pm.
Directed by Damiano Damiani (1970).

La Morte de La Cuffe, 26 March, 7pm.
Directed by Patricia Lacomme, Jean Rochefort (1990).

Japanese Information and Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St. Garden City, 21 March, 3pm.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa (1952). The film will be preceded by a lecture by Samir Farid.

Cineastes change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinema.

El-Nom FM-Astral (Sound Asleep)
Radio, 24 Tolat Harbi St. Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Raga, Raga St. Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Masrah El-Suwayri St. Heliopolis. Tel 393 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 4.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St. Dokki. Tel 333 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

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In the absence of regret

Gaston Zananiri, Alexandrian, priest, poet and cosmopolitan, died earlier this month. Hala Halim outlines the life and times of a remarkable man

"You, dear cosmopolitans, see nothing but the brilliant and narrow circle you know, ignoring a whole world which was unknown to you, even if you frequented those who could have told you about it. In a few years, we will all be dead and you will take with you nothing but the memories of your miles. What will remain of the Alexandria of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — as was the case with the city of the Ptolemies — is the profoundly spiritual and human vitality bequeathed by those who have analysed it."

Père Gaston Zananiri, "Alexandrie au reflet de la mémoire", *Mélanges*, Journal of the Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire, issue 16, 1983

Affectionately chiding, the passage above bears something of the urbane but impassioned tone that runs through the prodigious corpus of Gaston Zananiri (b Alexandria, 9 January 1904 - d. Paris, 2 March 1996). In this, one of the few published extracts from his memoirs, the words are addressed to Alexandrian cosmopolitans who fail to recognise their city in the works of Durrell, Cavafy and Fausta Terzi, "each [of whom] in his own way, penetrated Alexandria in its most diverse aspects, analysing its social and human structure". Zananiri does not include himself among the august company. Yet his own works — literary, historical, sociological, theological — chart that other subterranean, spiritual Alexandria and the Mediterranean world it opened unto.

It was in a villa in Sporting, Alexandria, that Gaston was born, the second child of Georges Zananiri Pacha and Marie-Jeanne Bauer, an Hungarian-Italian Jewess of free-thinking parents who converted to Christianity prior to her marriage. Indeed, pronounce the name Zananiri and the first association that comes to the minds of most Alexandrians is the tram-stop, Cleopatre-Zananiri, and the nearby Souk Zananiri, Gaston's family name being tagged on to "Cleopatre" to distinguish this station from the nearby Cleopatre-les-Bains on the other tram line.

The district, Cleopatre, was subdivided in 1912 by the municipal council...with the western section given the name Cleopatre-Zananiri because of the presence of the souk, named after Georges Zananiri, "confirms architect Mohamed Awad of the Alexandria Preservation Trust. The Zananiri name, though, had already travelled a long way before coming to reside in Alexandrian nomenclature.

The Zananiris are descended from one Nemettallah, a Greek Catholic notable born in Blosa, in the Hauran, Syria, where he died of the plague. His descendants decided to leave the region because of the pestilence, due to the rivalries that agitated the mountain of Hauran". According to a delectable monograph on the family by Gaston entitled *Une famille D'Alexandrie: 1700-1985*, another Nemettallah, a grandson, spent a short spell in Damascus in 1699, before boarding a ship for Alexandria.

There, for several generations, the Zananiris monopolised the harbour customs of Alexandria, performing their duties with rigour, as Gaston deduces from the fact that one ancestor was murdered. His own grandfather, Antoine, a polyglot, was employed as chief-dragoman at the British Consulate-General, which moved from Cairo to Alexandria in 1864 and as a consequence Antoine, married to an Armenian Catholic from Constantinople, and his descendants, were granted British nationality. In those days before the abolition of slavery, he was to use the privileges then accorded foreign citizens to offer asylum and franchise to any slave who sought refuge at his house.

Georges Zananiri Pacha, Gaston's father, was secretary-general of the Conseil sanitaire maritime et quarantenaire d'Egypte (Maritime Health and Quarantine Council of Egypt), an organisation whose main activity centred focussed on pilgrims returning from Mecca and ship borne passengers in transit in the Suez Canal. He was conferred the title of Bey of the first order, and then Pacha, on the recommendation put to the Porte by Khedive Abbas Helmi (with whom Georges' post brought him in contact).

"As I lived constantly in his [Georges Zananiri's] wake, I had the chance to meet and know many of his friends. I was the 'son of the Pacha', with all the advantages and servitudes this brought. I accepted the consequences with an intimate satisfaction mixed with insouciance and a desire for evasion brought about by a secret life. My final departure from Egypt allowed me to find myself," Gaston reflects in *Une famille D'Alexandrie*.

On graduating from Victoria College (1921), Gaston followed his father into the Maritime Health and Quarantine Council, where he was to remain until 1939, when the council, hitherto an international institution, was Egyptianised. Whatever the circumstances of his resignation, Gaston was to use the opportunity to embark on his second tour around the world in 1939. Meanwhile, he had secured a B.A. in law from the Ecole française du Caire and the University of Paris (1926). From 1940 to 1949 he worked at the Alexandria Social Works Association and also produced journalistic pieces, while from 1949 to 1950 he held the post of press counselor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The entry on Gaston Zananiri in *The Egyptian Who's Who of 1947* designates him as a "man of letters". By then, both Gaston and his older sister, Nelly Vaucher-Zananiri, were recognised figures among the "écrivains d'expression française d'Egypte" (Francophone writers of Egypt). Both played prominent roles on the cultural scene. Gaston was a founding member of l'Atelier in Alexandria (1935). He also participated with Patrice de Zogheb in founding the Salon des artistes d'Alexandrie (1935). Nelly, on her return from a sojourn in Europe, hosted a literary and political salon in Cairo. While Nelly's output was mostly poetry, Gaston's writings were more wide-ranging, providing the basis for his later, encyclopedic works.

In his early work there were two main strands: the literary and the historical. His first book, published when he was 19, was an ambitious assessment of the reign of Khedive Ismail, *Le Khedive Ismail et l'Egypte*. His second, *Tor, historique et quarantenaire* (El-Tor, History and 40th Anniversary), a commissioned monograph on the quarantine in Sinai, chronicles the institution from its establishment, providing exhaustive data on the pilgrim season each year and the improvement in equipment. His first collection of poetry to be published, *Rythmes Dispersés* (Scattered Rhythms, 1932), shows a poet experimenting with modes and influences to find a voice, invariable rhymed, most poems start with an epigraph from Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, Flaubert, among others. There are set pieces like the lyric "As among others, where the landscape is depicted in a stylised fashion. More successful are those poems where local subjects become the vehicle for a modernist exploration of city life. Among these is the poem "Le Mueszén", de-

scribing the unfiring of the muezzin's voice at sunset which brings the whole city kneeling "to exalt the glory", incongruously, "Of the Lord", and which ends on a tantalising note of doubt, carrying a discreet whiff of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach".

"The silence is profound. Listen to the advent of evening. We are alone here with our desire, our hopes."

"Gueneva", which takes its name from the one-time red light district of Alexandria, is prefaced by an epigraph from Oscar Wilde on the "acid taste" of love. It is a portrait of squalor and sordor rendered with compassion. Zananiri's sensitive ear to rhythm stands him in good stead in the very witty poem entitled "Babel". With an epigraph from Genesis, the Babel of the poem is the radio ("the universe enclosed in a box"). In rhymed couplets, the poem imitates the cacophony of sounds characteristic of the cities of the world: "Pekin parle famine/ Viennne de sa ruine..." (Peking talks of famine/ Vienna of its ruin...).

"Babel" was among a number of poems by Zananiri's anthologised in Jean Moscatelli's *Poètes en Egypte* (1955). Another poem by him in the anthology shows the imprint of Cavafy, "Il y a vingt-cinq ans" (Twenty Five Years Ago) is about a young man who cannot wait for the shop where he works to close so that he can return home to his readings in communism and philosophy, and who in the last line of the poem pronounces himself a failure. The solitary figure, the sordor of the quotidian contrasted against thwarted aspirations are unmistakably Cavafian in subject and tone.

Halfway through life, Zananiri made, in quick succession, two important decisions: leaving Egypt for good in 1953 and entering the Dominican order. His departure from Egypt is a subject of which he spoke little to acquaintances, though later in life was to write much about. Zananiri returned only once to Egypt after his immigration, in 1955. A passage on his, as well as the cosmopolitans', immigration from Egypt is worth quoting in its entirety.

"Alexandria was the city of my joys and disappointments. It was not only the city, but the 'country' that I loved deeply and where, generations before, my family put roots. The city where I lived and had been privileged, ignoring all the experiences of those who surrounded me, sharing only of myself and of the advantages from which I benefited.



An illustration by G.J. Dimos for "Le Poète" (The Poet), in Gaston Zananiri's *Rythmes Dispersés* (Scattered Rhythms)

cision to enter the Dominican order was not without precedent. It was a lifestyle not altogether alien to the Zananiri family. Two sons of the murdered great-grandfather had moved to Lebanon where they became Salatorian monks. In describing the clamorous aspect of his paternal family, Zananiri draws a portrait of the women who "rather than accept any old partner, preferred to remain single, dressed discreetly, consecrated themselves to an austere celibacy, to works of charity and sometimes sought admission in a Dominican or Franciscan Third Order", he explains in *Une famille D'Alexandrie*. (He fondly describes the pattern as reminiscent of the patriarchal system.)

More relevant, however, was Zananiri's own fascination with subjects drawn from Christian lore. There was his 1933 book, *Trois anachorètes d'Egypte* (Three Anchorites from Egypt) on Paul, the first hermit, Mary the Egyptian and the proliferation of churches dedicated to her in Europe, and Pisenorios, one of the last of the fathers of the desert who died almost on the eve of the Arab in-

logical writings. His vast knowledge of diverse subjects proved useful in compiling and contributing to a number of dictionaries and encyclopedias. Among these, for example, was *L'Univers des Loisirs* (The World of Leisure), in which he wrote entries on subjects as varied as religious theatre and the clown. In the *Dictionnaire Général de la Francophonie* his contributions included, naturally, the entries on the Mediterranean and on Exoticism.

Zananiri maintained his ties with the Egypt of his youth and was an entertaining and knowledgeable guide to many Egyptian visitors and acquaintances. Père Merigoux remembers a very pleasant outing with Zananiri, a few years ago while visiting Paris, when the Alexandrian's knowledge of the city and particular of the quarter Le Marais was impressive. And a third tour of the world was in store for Zananiri, this time as the chaplain aboard the France on her maiden voyage around the world (1972).

Alexandrian subjects, though, were never far from his mind. While in the earlier part of his life Zananiri had written more of the city of the Ptolemies, he was later to write a lengthy memoir largely of his own Alexandria, the published excerpts of which attest to a wealth of historical and sociological insight. *L'Esprit Alexandrin* (The Alexandrian Spirit), a monograph reprinted in 1987, was originally written in 1945. It explores the spirit of Ptolemaic city, though the author concludes that that spirit continues into modern times, thanks to the unchangeable landscape. Alexandria being a crucible of influences and races in Ptolemaic times, he argues, it produced a synthesis of the methodological rigour of Arian thought and the Semitic spirit, with its mysticism, dialecticism, and exaltation. In Zananiri's opinion, the Jewish philosopher Philo epitomises the pure Alexandrian spirit which synthesised opposites. Zananiri remarks that while in later times pagans and Christians would clash, the essence of their creeds was the same, the difference being one of interpretation.

On the first page of "Alexandrie au reflet de la mémoire", Zananiri tellingly endorses a remark made by Greek painter Jean Dukas: "A Proust is needed to describe Alexandria." A sensuous recollection of the city in all the variety of its aspects and seasons, the essay traces Alexandria through certain "arteries" such as the Corniche and the Rue de l'Ancienne Bourse. He outlines the construction of the Corniche, "an immense serpent illuminated at night", and its promenade atmosphere, describing the histories of certain monuments that punctuate it. Turning to Ras El-Tin Palace, for example, Zananiri informs his readers of the fact that it was built over the ruins of an ancient temple dedicated to Neptune, and goes on to chart its role in the turbulent counter between Muhammad Ali and the European powers.

The Rue de l'Ancienne Bourse Zananiri described in terms of three sections: the first, offices and the celebrated (now sold) Union Restaurant, the second so punctuated with cafés and bars that it was referred to by British soldiers as "Beer Street", the third section that of the big hotels and a park, where people went either at sunset, to take in the breeze or at night, in search of adventure. Unlike other essays on cosmopolitan Alexandria, Zananiri includes a section on the Muslim city, describing the formation of outstanding Alexandrian women such as the feminist Ceza Nabarouli. The rest of Zananiri's memoir remains unpublished, but has been deposited at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Another legacy Zananiri left Alexandria was the decision made before his departure from Egypt to bequeath his own as well as his father and grandfather's libraries to the Greek Catholic church in Alexandria. Full of invaluable source material on Alexandria, the Centre d'Etudes D'Alexandrie is only sporadically open, and currently lacks a regular librarian.

The last words on so remarkable an Alexandrian should be his own: "That city [Alexandria], I have loved it and still do," he writes in *Une famille D'Alexandrie*. "I can neither forget its sun, its colours, the seafloor, nor the small, simple people who were unaware of our emotional and sexual complications or of our intellectual problems, but who, quite often, offered an example of a spirituality that escaped me."

"All this was swept away by a wind of nationalism. This is why I wanted to exile myself, to open, at the age of 50, a new leaf in my life, even while inclining towards my past from time to time. This past returns often, and I receive it without regret and without nostalgia, since it allows me to discover, in every instant, while I journey in the world, something of that Alexandrian spirit where there reign unconsciously echoes of a pagan humanism that allows me, uprooted as I am, to put roots wherever I find myself."

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A page from *The Egyptian Who's Who of 1947*. Clockwise: Gaston Zananiri; Fernand Zananiri; Georges Zananiri

Alexandria... was also the 'country' where we lived in isolation... because we felt superior as well as crushed. We were conscious of what our families had done centuries ago. We were the elite who never wanted to become integrated, and this is why, at the rise of Middle-Eastern nationalism, we were excluded. Such was the result of our own indifference, certainly, I could have continued to live in the city that witnessed my birth. But I could no longer bear the silent reproach of a collectivity which, free at last, wanted at any cost to detach itself from those who participated in its rise with a detachment consisting of reserve, marked with paternalism."

"The Pacha's son-turned-Dominican-father" commented an acquaintance when Zananiri's name was raised. But to what extent was the decision to enter the order in his early fifties (he was ordained in 1956) an anomaly?

"It is quite unusual. Most people enter the order at a much younger age. I think an exception was made for him; and he completed his theological and philosophical studies in record time," comments Dominican Father Pierre Noury, whose acquaintance with Zananiri began when he entered the order. While Père Noury doubts that Zananiri had previously considered becoming a Dominican, the decision, he speculates, was made after his encounter with Père Dumont at Istina (a Russian word for truth), a French research centre oriented towards the Orthodox, particularly Russian world.

Though very much a man of the world, Zananiri's de-

vasion of Egypt. This was followed by his 1937 play *Thais* about the legend of the prostitute-turned-nun (also the subject of an Anatole France novel by the same title).

After entering the order Zananiri's writing was to take a different direction. Drawing on his heritage and formation, he wrote prolifically on the Eastern Church and its various denominations as well as on the rapport between Christianity and Islam. His *Catholicisme Oriental* (Oriental Catholicism) is an excellent book, comments Père Jean-Marie Merigoux of the Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire. "He understood well what was needed to be said to Western Christians who do not understand who Copt, Armenian and Greek Catholics etc are. Unlike many other books on the subject, which are rather complicated, his is very clear, very well-done and practical. It also explains that Catholicism is not exclusively western and that these are not sects but a variety of manifestations of the unity of Christianity", he comments.

At the Couvent de l'Annonciation in Paris, where he stayed from 1969 to his death earlier this month, Zananiri established the centre COMI (Chrétiens Orientaux et Monde Islamique), a research centre concerned with issues relating to Islam and Christianity as well as Middle Eastern questions.

It would be wrong, though, to suppose that after entering the order Zananiri devoted his time to a cloistered existence, producing only ecumenical and theo-

Plain Talk

I have always enjoyed listening to Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. I still hear echoes of the flute for the bird, the oboe for the duck, the clarinet for the cat, and so on. Indeed, it was through this delightful composition that I was first introduced to the different instruments of the orchestra. That was, needless to say, over 40 years ago, when I was working in London.

I was thus overjoyed to hear that the story has been translated into Arabic. The man behind this laudable task is Nazih Gergis, the director of the Washington-based US Midwest Performing Arts Council. I confess that I had hitherto been unaware of the existence of the institution. It is an organisation that has been working quietly for the promotion of cultural understanding between the US and the Arab world.

If the organisation devotes a major part of its activities and funds to music, that is because "we see music as communication, as education, and as a medium to lift and join the hearts and minds of Arab and American people," says Gergis. And how right he is.

There is no doubt that music, a universal language, carries well across national, linguistic and cultural borders. Indeed, I would add the music's other qualities: the mystical — witness on our home turf, for example, the whirling dervishes. Could such trances be achieved in absence of music? Probably yes, but music certainly transports the listener.

The council is a non-profit organisation founded in 1988. Ranking top on its list of priorities is the aim of promoting performances by American symphony orchestras, as well as opera and ballet companies in the Arab world. However, the council cannot be said to hold a propagandist agenda. It also aims at sponsoring performances in the US by Arab musical, singing and dance troupes.

The very first activity of the council, in February 1990, was to present *Peter and the Wolf* at the Concert Hall in Washington's Kennedy Centre. What was truly significant about the performance was that, apart from Prokofiev's work, Ramzi Yassa played at the event. His repertoire included the last movement of Rimsky Korskov's *Scherzade* and Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* to very positive reviews.

The music critic of the *Washington Post*, to cite but one example, wrote of the performance: "Mr Yassa seems to have an intuitive sense of Beethoven's *Emperor*. Despite the grandness of the piece, Mr Yassa was able to give it a welcome intimacy and warmth. His was a clean, acute and ultimately very powerful reading."

The latest activity of the council was a performance of *Peter and the Wolf* at the American University in Cairo. The event was sponsored by the Fulbright Commission in Egypt. This was followed by a reception at the offices of Fulbright attended by such luminaries as Yehia El-Fakhari and Ramzi Yassa. The reception was held in commemoration of the 43rd anniversary of Prokofiev's death. The guest of honour, rather touchingly I must say, was his son Oleg, who was present at the event.

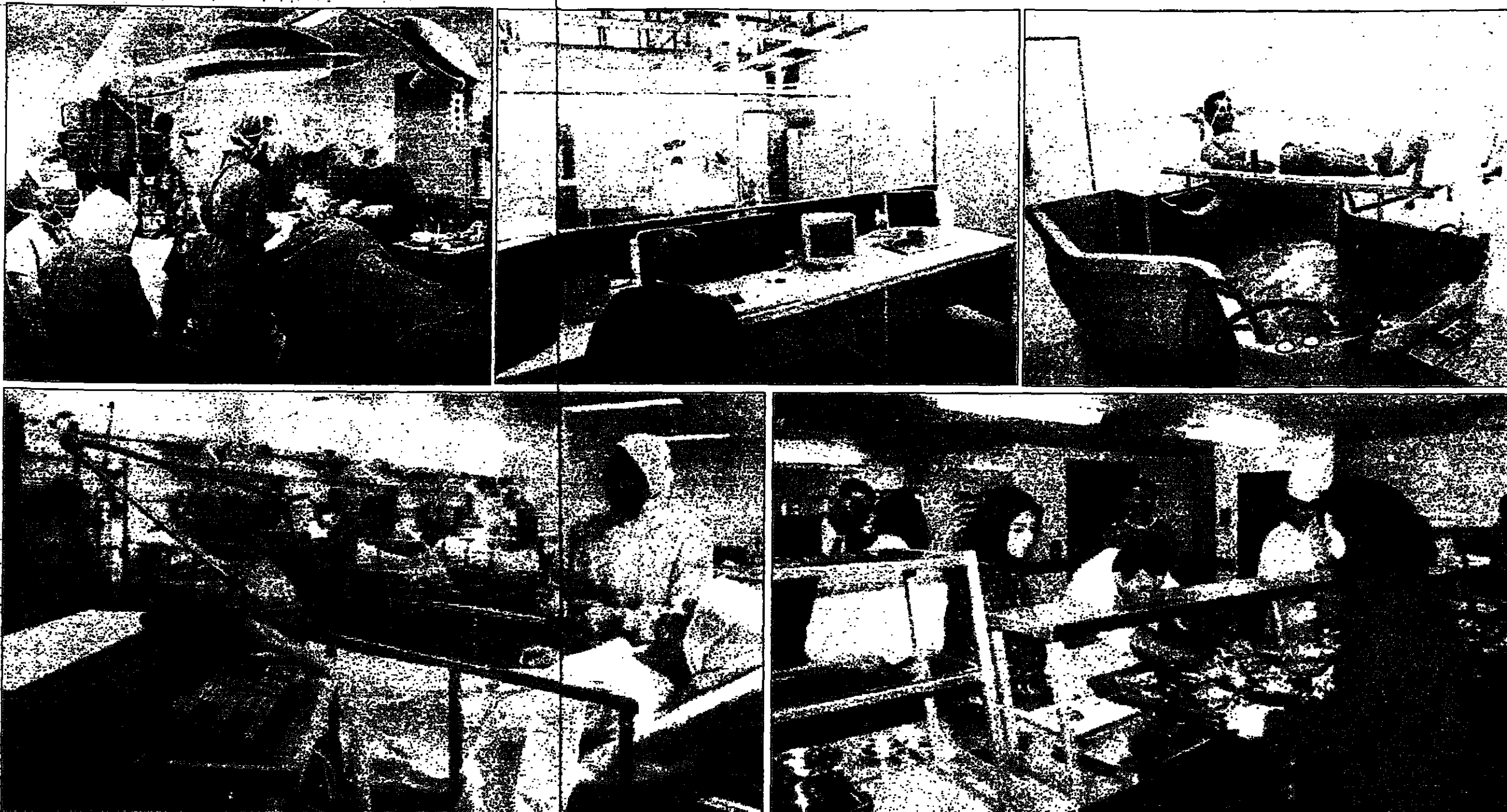
This brings me to an important new activity of the Fulbright Commission. We are all by now familiar with the commission's edifying public lectures, soon to be supplemented with a more ethereal fare. In a meeting with Dr Anne Radwan, executive director of the commission in Egypt, she spoke to me about the new concert series about to be launched by Fulbright, as an enhancement of their other cultural-related activities.

Each concert, says Radwan, will be sponsored by corporate and individual contributors, as well as by the musicians themselves who will be called upon to donate their time and talents.

The first concert in the series is scheduled to take place at the headquarters of the commission in April. Both amateur and professional musicians will be invited to perform. The intention, affirms Radwan, is to bring new talents to light — not altogether new objective.

This is certainly a welcome addition to the activities of the commission. Need I at this point commend Radwan's dynamic and versatile performance at the helm of the commission? And her decision certainly shows that she shares my faith in the universal quality of music.

Mursi Saad El-Din



Bully equipped operating theatre, high tech X Ray unit, physical therapy units, as well as a state-of-the-art recovery unit, are among the prominent features of the new Qasr El-Aini. Improvements have also been extended to other areas such as the kitchen and the cafeteria

photos: Sherif Sonbol

ce... and paupers

Building upon an ancient foundation

Not altogether accurately, Mohamed Ali is generally recognised as having instigated a major medical revival in Egypt after several centuries of stagnation. Al-Jabarti was the first to point out a decline in health conditions, followed by members of the Napoleonic missions; then travellers coming to Egypt towards the end of the 18th century gave the impression that the country lacked a medical infrastructure altogether. Lane describes Egyptian physicians simply as "miserably ignorant barbers".

Another misconception is that Mohamed Ali's intent was to import Europe's ready-made medical knowledge and apply it in Egypt. But, argues Amira Sonbol, assistant professor at Georgetown University's Christian-Muslim Centre of Cooperation, the Pasha could not have introduced a whole new system which would have alienated the population. The basis had to be there. What he did mainly was to improve on existing indigenous institutions.

It is probably during the Umayyad period that the Arab caliphs thought of building hospitals. The two most important that survived into Mohamed Ali's time, were *Al-Bimaristan* (from *bi-mar*, sick and *stan*, house), *Al-Atiq* (the "ancient hospital") built by Salah El-Din (Saladin) in 1172 AD, and the *Bimaristan Al-Mansouri*, built by Sultan Qalauun in 1283 AD.

Older than these two was the *bimaristan* built by Ahmed Ibn Tulun in Fustat in 872-74 AD, of which he was so proud that he paid it twice-weekly visits. Men and women were equally treated there for free and could only be declared cured — and released — if able to eat in one meal, without discomfort, a loaf of bread and a whole chicken.

During the French occupation another large hospital comprising 400 beds was opened in El-Ezbekiya.

During all these periods the services provided by the hospitals were free. Some hospitals were privately owned but all others depended on endowments by Egypt's rulers and the rich. "One cause for the deterioration of health institutions, toward the end of the 18th century," writes Sonbol in *The Creation of a Medical Profession in Egypt 1800-1922* (Syracuse University Press, 1991), "is that only a small proportion of the amounts received was spent on *kharay* (charities) — the rest was confiscated by the Mamlukes. These hospitals were forced to depend for their existence on whatever personal donations were given to them."

Medical education, according to Sonbol, was available to all segments of society. Medicine was taught in colleges run by well-known physicians, by private tutorship (a physician could decide to give lessons to a student or a group, usually his sons and nephews) and in hospitals which comprised well-stocked libraries and lecture halls.

Prosper Alpin, visiting Egypt in 1581-84, reports on a substantial number of practising Egyptian doctors and on the existence of examinations for those wishing to become doctors, men and women alike, Sonbol writes.

Although Mohamed Ali often only improved on existing structures, he can however be credited with the creation of a modern medical school. Whether it was Mohamed Ali's or Clot Bey's idea in the first place is unclear and whether this school was part of Mohamed Ali's overall plan to rebuild the army, or stemmed from a desire to upgrade the Egyptian education system is still open to debate, but regardless of the present controversy, a school of medicine was created, attached to the military hospital of Abu Zaabal, and began producing physicians soon after it opened in 1827.

"When Clot Bey arrived in Egypt from Marseille in 1825, the health service consisted of one army hospital located in Abu Zaabal, the *Bimaristan Al-Mansouri*, which had fallen into ruins, and a few private clinics run by European and Levantine doctors," writes Sonbol. Spiritual healing

Mohamed Ali may have founded modern medicine in Egypt, but professional hospital care extends much deeper into the country's history



Clot Bey Ali Ibrahim Naguib Mahfouz

and old family remedies were in extensive use. The idea of formally educating Egyptian medical professionals met with considerable opposition from Mohamed Ali's entourage. The school was nevertheless opened and "Clot Bey appointed director. The professors were carefully chosen by him. They were chiefly French, Spanish, Italian and Bavarian," wrote Naguib Bey (later asha) Mahfouz, in *The History of Medical Education in Egypt* (Cairo, 1935). The language of instruction was French; translators had to be provided for the students, who spoke Arabic.

The late Mahfouz, formerly sub-dean of the Faculty of Medicine and professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, wrote that a visitor to Egypt on a special mission commissioned by the French government, commented in 1833: "The School of Medicine and Pharmacy and of Veterinary and Chemistry, etc., are composed exclusively of Arabs. Monsieur Clot tries to give his students a national Arab spirit. I do not know if he deserves to be praised or reprimanded." In 1832 the first mission of medical students arrived in France. Some of these candidates came back in 1838 and were attached as "repeaters" to the School of Medicine of Abu Zaabal, "where they would deliver the French lectures in Arabic."

The School of Medicine had been attached to the Abu Zaabal Hospital for obvious reasons: the largest hospital in Cairo, it was always filled with patients. Most of the school professors were chosen from the hospital's staff. Its isolated position kept it out of the curiosity of a public prejudiced against dissections. Finally it kept the students well away from the distractions of the metropolis.

In 1837 however, the troops were fighting in Syria and consequently the hospital was empty. It was therefore decided to move the school to another location. Clot supervised its transfer to the palace of Qasr El-Aini. Built in 1466-67 by Ahmed Ibn El-Ash, the Grand Master of the Horse and grandson of the Sultan Khushkudam, it included the tomb of El-Aini adjoining the palace with a small mosque above the tomb. The west of the garden was occupied by a *Sufi sikkiyya*, which was demolished to give way to the school of Pharmacy and the ex-

amination hall of the faculty. Many historical events had been associated with the palace after El-Aini's death. For a time it had been the residence of the viceroys of Egypt. During the French occupation it was turned into a military hospital and, as reported in the *Description de L'Egypte*, fortified by a surrounding wall, wrote Mahfouz. According to Al-Jabarti, in 1812 Mohamed Ali repaired the palace "after the model of Greek buildings". From 1812 to 1825 it was used as a guest house and in 1927 made into a preparatory school for cadets.

In his memoirs, Clot explains the compelling reasons that inspired the choice of this particular site: "The palace is a quadrangular building, surrounded by beautiful gardens. It is composed of two floors above the rez-de-chaussée. All the wings are composed of two rows of wards separated by a corridor. Each wing is divided into four saloons containing 50 beds each. The rez-de-chaussée is composed of vaulted caves which can serve as stores. The courtyard is a wide space filled with trees. The southern wing contains four big buildings separated from each other. The first was destined for the amphitheatres, the laboratories of chemistry and the lecture rooms of Physics and Natural History. The second was used as dormitories and refreshment rooms. The third was used as Central Pharmacy and the fourth building for kitchen, bath-rooms and lavatories."

Furthermore, the hospital would be near the garrison, the patients would not have to be transported for long distances and access by river or land would be facilitated. According to Mahfouz's account, "the patients who were distributed between the hospitals of Abu Zaabal, and El-Ezbekiya were all brought to one place and gave sufficient material for the necessary clinical teaching. This material was furthermore increased by allowing the treatment of civilians in the hospital." Another advantage was that *ulemas* who came from different countries to study at Al-Azhar had ready access to the lectures given at the School of Medicine and could be instructed in medical practices which they carried back to their respective

countries.

According to Mahfouz, "the medical course was at this time five years and there were 500 students. The students varied in age from 20 to 25 years and wore a military uniform. They were fed, dressed and lodged at the expense of the government. They also received pocket money beginning at FT40 a month."

Mohamed Ali's modernising steps included the education of *hakimas* (women doctors) — a description more fitting than that of midwife (*daw*); as Laverne Kuhnke observes in *The Doctors on a Donkey: Women Health Officers in Nineteenth-century Egypt*, these women were not only trained to assist in childbirth "but were sent out to the villages to perform a large number of other medical tasks."

We read in Mahfouz's history that Clot Bey had immense difficulties recruiting for his Abu Zaabal school for midwives. Actually the government had to buy Abyssinian and Sudanese girls from the slave market who, along with two eunuchs from the Viceroy's palace, became the first students of the school. In 1835 ten more slaves were bought. The number was further increased by ten young orphans who had come to the hospital for treatment and were never claimed by their families. As all these students were illiterate, they had first to be taught how to read and write Arabic. Mademoiselle Gault, a French *accouchese* (midwife) at the palace, instructed the pupils in midwifery, vaccination, cupping and bandaging. Lessons in *Materia Medica* and Dispensing were also included, wrote Mahfouz.

From Abu Zaabal, the school was transferred to El-Ezbekiya, then, as it grew, gaining the confidence of the general public, and acquiring more students (orphans and the daughters of soldiers), it was installed in a separate two-storey building adjacent to Qasr El-Aini. For the first time the future *hakimas* were able to combine practical with theoretical midwifery during their final year of study.

Before 1893 and the British takeover of the hospital, "the students of Qasr El-Aini originated from the lower stratum of the Egyptian society, the urban poor and peasants of Upper and Lower Egypt," writes Sonbol. At the time of the takeover, she adds, the staff with one exception were all Egyptian graduates of the school who had successfully completed medical studies in Europe. After the takeover, only the sons of the well-to-do families were admitted. A small number of the poorer students remained and none came from the rural areas. Government-supported study missions were curtailed and those who could afford it elected to go abroad rather than start at Qasr El-Aini. The school of midwifery was downgraded to a school for nurses. Foreign doctors were encouraged to open private practices and teach at the Medical School at the expense of their Egyptian counterparts. English was made the language of instruction and the obligation to master it and learn to think in it alienated many Egyptian doctors from their less educated patients. An elite was slowly formed, closer to Western ways of thinking, and a gap created between urban British-taught physicians and the inhabitants of rural areas who had no use for the English language.

This trend of elitism was further accelerated by the institution of fees for entrance, LE15, at the School of Medicine, which few poor families could afford. At the same time the number of scholarships was drastically decreased. Finally, writes Sonbol, a British-inspired innovation was introduced: that of dividing the one-class hospital into five classes of which only the lowest allowed for any form of free service.

In 1919, when the Egyptians took over more responsibilities, some of the British reforms were reversed. But not all. Over the years of combination of several systems was worked out, more or less to the advantage of the parties concerned, but medical care was no longer available for rich and poor alike. The days of the *bimaristan* were gone for ever.

Old for new?

Is the new Qasr El-Aini hospital just Manial's wealthier, classier, cousin, or will the two strike a necessary balance?

Dr Ali Abdel-Fattah, ex-health minister and professor of dermatology at Ain Shams University, laments the fact that the new Qasr El-Aini hospital serves educational purposes in surgery and internal medicine only. He suggests that, as regards the number of professors and facilities, the Manial hospital is sufficient for student training and education. "Only cases from the Manial hospital needing a high level of technology not available there should be referred to the new hospital," he said.

The new hospital, he clarified, should be reserved for post-graduate studies and teaching purposes. Abdel-Fattah further suggests that rooms with two or four beds should be devoted to reasonably priced treatment to serve middle-class patients who cannot afford the specialised hospital yet would disdain a six-bed room in the public hospital. "Unlike other private hospitals where costs of treatment may reach LE200 per night, Ain Shams Specialised Hospital, for example, provides such services for LE30-50 per night," he added.

In response, Dr Fouad El-Nawawi, general manager of the new hospital, said the board might study the notion of charging health insurance organisations costs on rooms with two to four beds in the public hospital.

Dr Mo'taz El-Shirbini, dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine and board chairman of Cairo University's hospitals, described the new hospital as a "special status unit" in terms of administration. "It implements the medical, research and educational policies of Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine, but is given freedom in funding, resources, payments and other routine activities," he said.

El-Shirbini anticipates the new hospital will benefit the almost 6,000 students of the faculty by providing them with advanced training in subfields of surgery and internal medicine. Noting that the new hospital has an updated version of Manial hospital's equipment, El-Shirbini finds what distinguishes the "new" from the "old" is the high level of accommodation services.

As the new hospital was initially established to complement services of the "old" one, some sort of coordination or exchange will take place between both, mostly in two spheres. The new hospital, having no out-patient clinics, will depend on Manial hospital in providing its out-patients, said Dr Abdel-Moeti Hussein, General Manager of Cairo University hospitals. The new hospital will also depend on the Manial hospital to provide medical equipment it does not currently have, such as cardiac catheters and magnetic resonance imaging, he added. He also stressed that Manial hospital has most of the equipment available at the new hospital, although not as advanced. "The new hospital's most distinctive facilities are the vascular surgery unit, operating theatres, clinical laboratories and radiology unit," Hussein added.

Hussein felt the new hospital fulfilled several important functions. Shifting surgery and internal medicine units to the new hospital will ease bed-occupancy pressure from Manial hospital and thus increase its quality of services. Although each unit in Manial hospital can take up to 50 patients, occupancy in the orthopedic surgery unit can reach 128 per cent, in urology 120 per cent and in emergency 115 per cent. Since surgery and internal medicine units, the most basic in medical studies, are available on a wider scale in the new hospital, this will definitely raise the quality of the education offered by Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine, Hussein predicted.

Major problems which arose in Manial hospital were avoided in the new hospital. In contrast to Manial, where almost 25 patients are crammed into each ward, the number of patients in the new hospital's rooms does not exceed six. Computers in Manial are only used in managerial and administrative offices, while they are central in all aspects of the new hospital.

Concerning measures taken to ensure the cleanliness of the new hospital, Hussein pointed to limiting visits by increasing visit prices, restricting visitors per patient to two at a time and forbidding visitors from bringing food into the hospital.



Fast and present the dream remains: the same: educating the young generations

photos: Randa Shaath



Pioneers in the field: Huda Shaarawi and Ceza Nabarawi

photo: Al-Ahram

Unsung heroine

While many exemplary mothers win media applause on Mother's Day, others remain in oblivion. **Gihan Shahine** meets a *bawwab*'s wife who struggles to give the very best to her five children



Mother's Day is usually no big deal to Fatma El-Said, the 39-year-old wife of a *bawwab* (doorkeeper) and the mother of five. But this year the day carries a little more significance: Fatma's eldest daughter is about to complete her four-year of studies at the Faculty of Commerce at Ain Shams University.

In a modest wooden room in the basement of a middle-class block in Helipolis, Fatma sits with her children, sips tea and looks intently into the horizon through a small window. She seems to have recurring memories of the hard days. Fatma's children remark that life has obviously left its imprint on her face: she looks older than she actually is. She says that her "plump cheeks have gradually flattened over the years." For a first-time mother, Fatma's ruddy face and lively smile give the aura of inner power, contentment and faith.

Born in the province of El-Sharqiya, Fatma hails from a rather affluent family: her father was a sheep dealer. The eldest of three brothers and one sister, Fatma developed an "independent and rebellious character," she reminisces. "I always had strong faith in the value of hard work. I even used to run away from school in order to work in farming, despite my father's disapproval. It is as if I was tracing myself for a hard life to come." She quit primary school in the third grade and regrets it, but there were other plans in the making. At 14, Fatma's father married her off to a "stranger," within almost a month of their acquaintance. This, she says, marked the turning point in her life.

Her husband, Mohamed Othman, was not well off and suffered from chronic bronchitis. He could hardly take out a living from farming in El-Sharqiya. "Our business almost broke even and sometimes we were even put in debt," Fatma explains.

Fatma and her husband finally decided to move to Cairo. For them, it was like heading to "the unknown": all they knew was that it was a great city where people could make a better living and children could receive a better education. Othman obtained a job as the *bawwab* of a building in Helipolis for LE25 a month. "That money was hardly enough to cover our basic needs," says Fatma. "My husband was always sick. I took him to many doctors in Cairo and El-Sharqiya, sometimes even carrying him on my back. The doctors were pessimistic about Othman's physical condition and did not expect him to live for over a month. I had two daughters at the time and was still carrying Fadia."

Fatma was nevertheless determined to enrol her children in school. She always believed that literacy was the source of her misery and poverty. "My husband never thought the same," she recounts. "But I was ready to go hungry rather than deprive my children of a chance to learn. I did not want them exposed to the same humiliation I had to face."

At the time, birth control never occurred to Fatma: her husband was destined to live and she had two more children, Soheir and Mohamed, besides the first three girls. She adamantly denies that she went through four pregnancies to end up with a boy. "We like boys and girls alike," she says of herself and her husband. "It is just that I mistakenly thought that having many children would provide me with support in life. I also never thought of money and left those matters in the hands of God."

Fatma now has to undertake extra duties to meet her ever-increasing obligations of schooling and medical care. When Cairo is still in slumber at 4am Fatma has already begun her daily chores: she cleans 30 cars at LE10 each per month. When the streets are bustling with life, she is busy responding to tenants' requests: running an endless string of errands and delivering heavy loads of soft drinks. Finally, she finishes her own housework.

"I never turn down any of the tenants' requests, even those made at midnight—in order not to upset them. I never get more than three or four hours sleep a day, which is usually interrupted by severe pain in my feet."

Fatma preens herself on the results of her efforts. Her children have always reached the top of their classes and, more often than not, the building's tenants overheard them chatting in English or sometimes uttering a few words in French and German. Basma, 22, the eldest, is in her last year at Ain Shams University's Faculty of Commerce. Fadia,

18, is in her first year of architecture at Helwan University's Faculty of Fine Arts and has already completed her advanced English course. Soheir, 16, is in her second year of secondary school, having scored a high total of 96 per cent in the third year of preparatory school, and Mohamed is still in the fifth primary. On the walls of the children's room hang dozens of honour certificates.

"We all owe our success to our mother," admits Fadia. "She suffered a lot to educate us and never let us waste a minute on housework during the academic year, which gave us the impetus to study even harder. From her we learnt a lot that hard work must reap fruits in the end; that ambition has no limits; that higher education is the only shield against social injustice and poverty."

Denied these privileges herself, Fatma believes that nowadays, girls should not think of marriage before graduation: they should choose their partners without much interference on the parents' part, and they should select a spouse of an equal educational standard but not necessarily of an equal social background. She also believes that newtyeds should not even consider having more than two children if they want to educate them properly.

But Fatma surrendered to the marriage of her 20-year-old daughter Amina though she was still an undergraduate and had been engaged for five years. "I only agreed when her husband, who graduated from the same faculty, promised to help her through her studies," explains Fatma. Her other daughters, however, have ambitions that soar beyond marriage and family life. Basma dreams of working at a respectable bank upon graduation and Soheir aspires for a career in journalism. Fadia plans to work during the summer to cover her college expenses, which total LE3,000. Thanks to the benevolence of go-gooders, she covered this year's fees. She hopes to find a job either in an English summer school or at the airport.

Though she is broadminded, Fatma knows next to nothing about feminism and women's rights. She is proud to be a student in the school of life, following only her common sense. Her daughters insist that women's activism has done

Egypt's awakening

From an article by Ceza Nabarawi published in *L'Egyptienne*, 1928

"...women neglected so far have recently been the object of much of the government's attention. This is only fit since it is women who will be called upon to effect the fastest and deepest changes in this new civilising enterprise. Educating young girls is like planting seeds which will grow to benefit not only the girls themselves but all those around them. As mothers and wives, women exert an immense influence which it is our duty to channel in positive directions."

We are ready to admit today that the present generation does not have the qualities of vigour that are instrumental in forming an independent nation, the responsibility for our shortcomings lies on the shoulders of those who insisted on keeping women in a backward condition: to build without women is to build on sand.

The emancipation of Egyptian women has so far been restricted to feminist demands [expressed] by a certain elite, who alone had an understanding of the road ahead. The poor, having no access to education, have remained until now completely cut off from the feminist movement.

Only now, when the government made the decision to push education forward with special emphasis on female schooling, can we assert that women's emancipation has reached the decisive point of concrete achievements.

In the olden days, the daughters of the aristocracy were allowed access to a certain degree of culture. Besides their insignificant numbers, their degree of knowledge was severely limited by the fact that they were forced to leave school as soon as they reached the age of 13 and 14. Moreover, the claustrophobic environment which was thereafter their lot had soon managed to erase the little enlightenment they may have benefited from. Society, therefore, had no chance to improve through their knowledge.

Today, things are changing; all mothers, whatever their social class, want to give their daughters an education.

Acknowledging public demands, the government has opened new girls' schools and has increased the overall number of classes. The barrier that separated women from their education has fallen. A secondary school with the same curriculum as the boys' has been receiving female students for the past three years. Last year, six young girls who were successful in obtaining the *ka-faa* for the first time gained much applause.

This year, our triumph is complete: of the first candidates to the Baccalaureate, six who graduated in sciences have enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine. Now we are able to boast that our young women have access to higher education.

It is interesting to note that we are celebrating this year the centenary of the School of Medicine... It has taken us Egyptian women a century to be acknowledged as having reached the same intellectual level as her male companion.

To spread girls' education across the country, the government has multiplied the number of elementary and primary schools. The level of instruction has sensibly improved in the past three years. Physical education and moral and civic studies have been introduced.

In 1925-1926 the ministry opened 780 free schools for boys and girls with the help of the provincial councils. They operate on the basis of a morning and an afternoon shift. The duration of the education programme is five years, the number of students—boys and girls—thus far enrolled, 99,600.

Translated by Fayza Hassan

practically nothing to improve their status: Fatma still has to work day and night and her family life is always put at stake since her husband is not enrolled in the government insurance system. "We applied for free medication at the Ministry of Health and received it only once: we were told other people were equally in need," complains Fatma.

Although Fatma's children have government health insurance, none of them has had any practical benefit from it. Fadia had her appendix removed at a hospital, but she had to pay for the operation and had serious complications. "The hospital was very dirty and the doctor was obviously inefficient," Fatma explains. "Later, when Amina and then Mohamed needed operations, they were put on an endless waiting list. I had to take them to another hospital and pay all the expenses myself."

Fatma, however, does not rage against the government as much as she does

against society itself. She only feels grateful to the benevolent few who helped her children reach their current standard of education. Still, she thinks that society has always put her and her children in a lowly status. "Many people still believe that it is too much for the daughters of a *bawwab* to be cleanly dressed and highly educated," Fatma explains. "When my daughter Fadia scored much higher marks in the *thawwama* [secondary school certificate] than her peers who live in the same building, and was eligible to join any college she wanted, when they found it hard to join any institute, the building residents tried hard to get rid of us. My husband and I had to put up with all sorts of humiliation in order to keep the job. My daughters also suffer a similar bias at school. All I need to know is: did we commit a crime trying to improve our status? Don't we have the right to a better life?" exclaims Fatma.

Pot
Pourri

A nurse's duty

For some, being a nurse has unpleasant connotations: "Rude, who would have normally been interested in 'in another country'—turns up her nose. 'They have a bad reputation,' she says."

For others, however, being a nurse represents the epitome of respectability.

Umm Amr has been working as a cleaner for over 25 years. At the age of 12 she left her village near Tanta and was placed by her father with a family in Cairo. Later, she was married to a construction worker and became a *sitt balt* (housemaker) just long enough to have five children. Then her husband was injured and became permanently incapacitated.

Umm Amr went back to work, supporting the whole family. She made good money, cooking and cleaning. "I am illiterate," she says. "What else can I do?" She is satisfied: "I choose the families I work for. If I am unhappy I simply do not go back. And it is good money. So what is wrong with that?"

Plenty, apparently, as she was soon to find out. Amr, her son, ran away from home. When she finally retrieved him he told her the children in the street referred to him as "the maid's son". He was now the man of the house and intended to quit school and support the family. Amr went to work but the couple of pounds a day that he earned as an apprentice did not stretch very far. Umm Amr tried to sell vegetables, bread, knick-knacks. She took tumbles in the mud picking the vegetables, spilled the bread balanced on her head and was often robbed. Still, that was not enough and soon she was selling her furniture and household appliances, her bracelets and her daughters' earrings in an attempt to feed her family.

One day she realised that they had become practically destitute. She had to do something. She went back to cleaning houses, returning home before Amr. Their economic condition slowly improved, a fact that did not go unnoticed in the neighbourhood. The women started whispering: "If Amr only finds out..." said Fatma, sucking on her lips. "He will run away again, never to be found this time." Aisha—"jealous of my new television," says Umm Amr—warned her of the danger. "If you shut your mouth nothing will happen," shouted a furious Umm Amr. "Besides, I am a nurse in a private hospital now, the doctor's assistant," she added impulsively. Aisha became pensive, mulling over the various possibilities.

The next morning Aisha arrived with a list which included iodine, mercurchrome, bandages, red-vitamin pills and laxatives. "How can I get you all these things, my sister?" asked Umm Amr, bewildered. "Take them from your hospital, that's how," said Aisha impatiently. "Hanan is a nurse—like you now—and she's always bringing us loads of medicines. And Umm Gabr's son had his appendix removed at her hospital for next to nothing."

Umm Amr was far from reassured by this turn of events. In the evening, she stopped at a pharmacy and bought a few cheap items. More demands followed. Umm Amr was becoming a regular customer at the pharmacy. Finally she rebelled and decided to put an end to the costly farce. "Stop asking for things," she told her neighbours firmly. "This is stealing." Furious clucked her tongue. "Is it *harām* to help your friends in need now?" she asked of no one in particular. "You know what? She is not a nurse at all, she has gone back to her old ways, trust me, I know her... Ah, poor Amr when he finds out the truth, he will kill himself." The women responded in unison: "Ah, poor Amr."

Umm Amr applied for a job at a small private hospital and was hired. A few days later she instructed her son Amr to come to the hospital with Nagaya, who had been pestering her to arrange for her daughter's tonsillectomy. "Like Hanan did for Umm Gabr."

When they arrived at the appointed time, she met them in her white uniform, complete with little cap. "The doctor has to deal with an emergency... one of the ministers," she told them casually. "But he said he would remove Warda's tonsils for only LE800 as a favour." He usually takes LE1,500 for such an operation," Nagaya was silent, digesting what she was seeing and hearing. "Well? What is the matter, is it too expensive for you? I am having my five children done soon." She was rewarded for her lies by the look of great pride on Amr's face.

The next day, Umm Amr went back to cleaning houses. "More money, more time off," she says. "And now they don't ask for anything. They say I am stuck up because I work in such an expensive hospital." She laughs: "Dalia"—her daughter—"will start working as a nurse next month."

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Artichokes and green broad beans

Ingredients:
5 or 6 artichokes (fresh)
1/2 kilo green broad beans
2 bunches of green dill (leaves only), finely chopped
1 medium onion (finely chopped)
4 heaped tbsp. flour
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
2 tsp. salt
1 1/2 tsp. corn oil
One spicy vegetable cube

Method:
In a large cooking pan, put the flour, the salt and the lemon juice, then fill more than half the pan with tap water. Dissolve the flour well by stirring it in the water and this is the solution in which you put your artichokes after removing the outer leaves and leaving the hearts. Cut each artichoke into 4, and after putting them into the solution, press them downwards by means of a smaller cover than that of the pan in order to immerse the artichokes inside the solution (this keeps your artichokes white in colour). Cover and boil for 10 minutes. In another pan, boil the beans after cleaning the sides from the threads (just like string beans) in clean water plus the cube. When they become tender, remove from the heat, then strain the artichokes from their solution and add them to the beans and bring to the boil adding some of the artichoke solution. In the meantime fry the onion in oil until tender and slightly golden. Add it to the artichokes and beans, stir and leave to cook for 5 minutes. Remove from heat while quickly stirring in the dill and cover (never boil the dill). Serve hot with freshly squeezed lemon.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sustenance for shoppers

Nigel Ryan overcomes a phobia

There are some prejudices to which I will willingly confess and one of them is that I do not like shopping malls. And so it is that there has been a certain turpitude in reviewing Café Olé, a new restaurant located in the Nile Hilton Shopping Mall, that oddly shaped conservatory like structure—that seemed to be years in the building—sandwiched between the Arab League building and the Nile Hilton on Tahrir Square.

But this week off I trotted, ignoring the shops on the first level to ascend the polished granite staircase to the in-house restaurant, which is located at the front of the building, affording views of the square.

And you know, it is not such a bad place after all. If you choose your table with care, which means sitting beyond the glossy walnut veneered bar, you hardly know you are in a shopping mall, which in any case, here, is less a cathedral to the new consumerism than a chapel. The Nile Hilton Shopping Mall is small. Café Olé is probably the largest establishment operating within the complex.

suppose, for the ladies who lunch brigade.

I ordered a pigeon salad, described as containing garden leaves, warm pigeon breast and fruit chutney. My lunch companion, eyes straying to the better section of the menu, ordered a spinach lasagne. It was reassuring to be told that the lasagne would take half an hour to prepare. We took advantage of the time, and ordered two local beers.

True to the waitress's word food was delivered after half an hour. In the meantime we had been presented with a basket of assorted bread rolls, together with butter, and bowls of things on which to nibble. The bread was excellent.

And so were the items ordered. My pigeon salad was indeed served with fruit chutney, on a bed of garden leaves—including freshly shredded red cabbage. The pigeon had been deboned, except for the leg joints. It is the first time, in Cairo, that I have eaten pigeon in a restaurant that has not been overcooked, which implies that somebody at Café Olé knows what they are doing.

Nor was it a mistake not to place the lasagne under the coyly titled light bites. Helpings were generous, in a very rich béchamel, topped with a mixture of ricotta and mozzarella.

And the biggest surprise was that one could linger quite comfortably by the window, watching the comings and goings in Tahrir Square. Café Olé is a pleasant place. Someone has thought about the menu, and it is well prepared. The bill for two, including two local beers, came to less than LE65. I shall go again, despite the shopping mall phobia.

Café Olé, Nile Hilton Shopping Mall, Tahrir Square.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

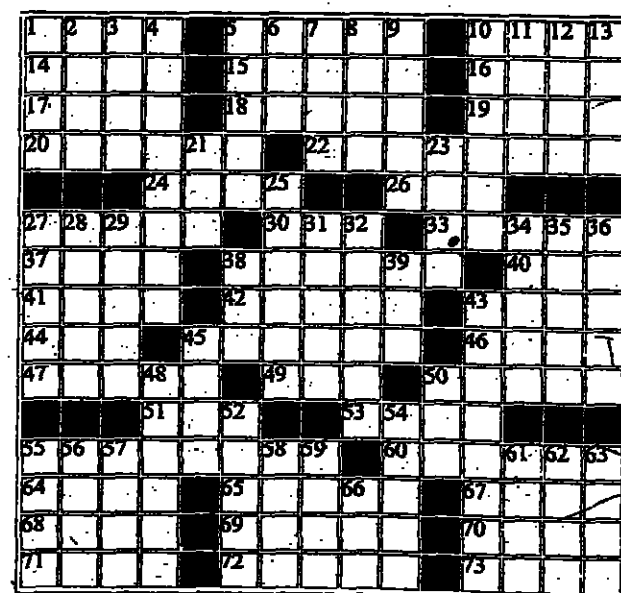
ACROSS

- Hit hard (4)
- West Side Story heroine (5)
- Arab prince (4)
- Dugout; retreat (4)
- Prevent (5)
- Destruction (4)
- Loitering; inactive (4)
- Gardening job (5)
- Deeds (4)
- Fouled up (6)
- Casual photograph (8)
- Soreness (4)
- Small deer (3)
- Grinding tooth (5)
- Towards the stern (3)
- Chemical compound (5)
- Lincoln et al. (4)
- Central court (6)
- Pub specialty (3)
- Pasture lands (4)
- Caller (5)
- Prejudice (4)
- Wasp (3)
- Wheat or maize (6)

Last week's solution

DOWN

- Poker stake (4)
- Fibrous plant used in rope making (5)
- Weather directions (3)
- Group of eight (5)
- Turf (3)
- Discharge (4)
- Impressiveness; stature (8)
- British exam, 2 wds (5)
- Wander around (4)
- Tiny organism causing disease (5)
- Take by force (4)
- Prediction (4)
- Classy few (5)
- Furies (4)
- Flippant (4)
- Some Scandinavians (5)
- Affirmative votes (4)
- Lithe (4)
- Walk through water (4)
- 24 Across, pl. (4)
- Invasive (8)
- Gras—last day of car rally (5)
- Hail (3)
- Textile fabric used in upholstery (4)
- Hard metal (4)
- Fragrant essential oil (5)
- Humiliates (6)
- Supersonic speed (4)
- Prep. of motion (4)
- Remainder (4)
- Auditory apparatus (3)



- Ode or epic (4)
- Cosmos (6)
- Boys and men (5)
- Reference marks (5)
- Dribbles (5)
- Sets on the loose (5)
- Infusion of dried herbs (6)
- Infect; spot of corruption (5)
- Make merry (5)
- Adjust (5)
- Time (3)
- United Textile of Louisiana, abb. (3)
- Microscopic plant causing disease (8)
- Coagulate (4)
- Be of one mind (6)
- Lubricator (3)
- Plunged (5)
- Biblical prophet (5)
- Rigid support (4)
- Eternal city (4)
- Always (4)
- ometer—type of litz and (4)
- Poetic name for Ireland (4)
- Change in succession (4)
- Dueling sword (4)
- Smaller number (4)
- One of a group of North American Indian tribes (3)

The bad, the mad, the sad...

The drug, the drug addict, the drug dealer, the drug healer and the drug fighter all came under the spotlight at a Cairo conference on drug abuse. Mariz Tadros attended

Egypt has gone beyond denying or downplaying the drug problem, the minister of health and population, Dr. Ismail Saleem, declared in a Cairo conference this week. In his opening speech to the First Egyptian International Conference on Addiction and Drug Abuse, Saleem said the Ministry of Health has already established drug treatment clinics in eight governorates with 560 beds and there are plans to open more clinics throughout the country. He added that such clinics would provide a free service for needy Egyptians.

Yet, has drug addiction reached epidemic proportions nationally? The scale of the drug problem in Egypt is virtually impossible to identify accurately, not because of its magnitude, but due to the lack of credible and accurate data. Dr. Ahmed Okasha, professor of psychiatry at Ain Shams University, suggested that "usually the amount of drugs seized by the government is 1/5-1/10 of that smuggled in by drug dealers. For example, the authorities seized 50 kilos of heroin in 1995 which means that there must have been around 500kg of heroin around and we would have 7,000-10,000 heroin abusers in Egypt. In a population of 60 million, it is not a big problem." Okasha said that the hashish intake was much higher, with 4,125 kilos seized in 1985. In 1995, there were over 1 million regular hashish users in Egypt — this is not counting the occasional users.

"As for cocaine consumption, it is not high compared to the US," pointed out Okasha, with 224 grams of cocaine being seized in 1995. Okasha said that while the use of hashish is declining, as well as opium which reached its peak in 1993, surprisingly, Egypt is in line with the world trend, i.e. a decrease in illicit drugs and an increase in alcohol abuse as well as psychoactive drugs such as amphetamines.

The findings varied according to the social and financial background of the user group. Whilst some studies show that the higher the social and financial status, the greater the number of users, the Epidemiological National Research on Drug Addiction report showed that the lower the income, the more regular the use. According to the study, this is because the poorer sectors tend to use cheap drugs, available in high quantities and easy to access, such as *bongos*, the leaves and flowers of the marijuana plant, and *kolla*, snuffing burnt tires, and glue sniffing. The poor resort to other methods free of charge. Burning cockroaches gives off the same acid smell as *kolla*.

Studies have also confirmed the correlation between the availability of the type of drug and its use by the individual. For instance, alcohol is consumed at a greater level in cities than in rural areas where it is very expensive or unavailable. As for villages, the consumption of *bongos* is much higher than in the city where hashish (amongst other drugs) is more popular.

Okasha emphasised the importance of avoiding generalisations about the profile of the addict, insisting that popular myths about addicts being psychopaths and criminals must be erased. He quoted one Edinburgh professor as stating that addicts can be "bad, mad, sad or good". Bad is the psychopath, mad is the schizophrenic, and sad is the depressive and good are the normal people who use drugs, for instance, in a quest for a solution to physical or so-

cial problems.

The circumstances that drive an ordinary Egyptian to drug abuse were extensively discussed at the conference by Professor Mohamed El-Gohari, president of Helwan University. El-Gohari insisted that the "absence of a family member, especially the absence of the father, is a common characteristic amongst young drug addicts. The absence of the father has a greater effect than the absence of the mother. If the family breaks down, living with the mother makes the children more susceptible to drug abuse, especially amongst male children."

El-Gohari was unrelenting in his exposure of the relationship between drug addiction and bad housing conditions amongst the working classes: "If I were to embark upon a campaign to combat drug abuse, I would start with the amelioration of Egyptian homes. Many don't have a home, in our understanding of the word. They just have a place to sleep and perform the basic necessities such as eating and drinking." El-Gohari explained that this is leading to a breakdown in communication amongst families, forcing the youth to search elsewhere for comfort and entertainment. He added that it is not just the quality of home life that is exacerbating the drug problem, but the lack of housing altogether. He charged that this is preventing many young people from leading a normal life, i.e. getting married, establishing a home and having a family.

El-Gohari went on to stress that the mental image of a drug user, especially a hashish smoker, amongst the lower classes is generally not a negative one. "It is always the hashish user who is light-hearted, of a happy disposition and who always tells the best jokes. Also, some of our most popular TV actors are known for being hashish smokers. For many, their image is very attractive, despite their association with drugs. The problem is that they also treat government anti-drug messages with suspicion or apathy," he said. El-Gohari added that since television is the most influential communication medium for the masses, the issue should be dealt with through soap operas, advertisements and the dissemination of messages from the religious leaders.

The Mufti of the Republic, Sheikh Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, insisted that even though the Islamic scriptures did not directly denounce drugs, Islamic scholars have long condemned them as *haram*, or sinful because of their damaging effects on the individual. Sheikh Tantawi said that the use of drugs is considered by Islamic scholars "as even more strictly prohibited than alcohol because the damage is far greater than that of alcohol". He said that there is sufficient medical evidence to legitimise its prohibition by Islam irrespective of the cultural values surrounding any particular drug. He refused to issue a *fatwa* (religious ruling) prohibiting cigarette smoking saying that medical evidence shows that its harm cannot be compared to that of drugs. To present the Christian Church's position vis-a-vis drug abuse, Dr. Victor Sami, assistant professor of psychiatry at Banha University told participants at the conference that despite popular myths that the laxity of Christianity towards alcohol drinking, there is much biblical evidence to prove that alcohol is looked upon unfavourably. He spoke extensively of the church's efforts and services used

Young drugs

A 17-YEAR-old denied he was on drugs, never touched the stuff. Yet his entire pocket money goes on tablets — mostly a mixture of cocaine and heroin. He started off with cough syrup, then moved on to sedatives and now it's amphetamines. Why? "Mazaa", he says, to put him in a happy mood. He is a grade "A" student, from a well-to-do family, in an expensive language school. He takes drugs to cope with the stress of study and examinations, he says. "They give me strength so that I can stay up late at night to study." What happens when your pocket money runs out? "I take a little money from my mother's purse without her knowing." How does he feel about it? "Isn't it better that I steal from my own family than from you?"

A 14-year-old boy in 3rd preparatory grade at a well-known secondary school was shown the art of sniffing benzene and *kolla* by his peers. It got so bad, his parents took him out of school and put him in a special drug treatment clinic. "There I was taught by the other patients the various ways of sniffing and snorting and smoking different drugs. They were experts," he said. With this newly acquired knowledge he was released from the clinic, supposedly cured after the few weeks he spent there.

The greatest danger is to put a patient in a clinic and leave him to mix freely with the other patients without supervision. They end up getting together to boast about their 'adventures', which only makes them want to get out sooner in order to reach new horizons in drug taking," Dr. Nargis Albert, professor of public health at Cairo University told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. The above cases are but a sample of drug addicts with whom she has had contact during her many years of fieldwork.

In a series of research projects carried out by Mustapha Souief, involving children in secondary school education, university students and industrial workers, comprising 14,000 persons, 5 per cent of secondary school students, 11 per cent of industrial workers and 15 per cent of university students all used hashish or its derivatives, compared to 13.90 per cent who used stimulants such as amphetamines and 4.21 per cent who used hypnotics such as opium. According to a report published in 1982 by Souief on addiction, out of a randomly chosen sample of 3,686 technical school pupils, 8.9 per cent used cannabis for recreational purposes. The use of *bongos* has immense popularity amongst secondary school and university students today. It is the latest drug fad, but no statistics are available to confirm the extent of its use although it is freely and commonly traded in schools around Egypt. Its greatest appeal to adolescents is that it is cheap and readily available.

to combat drug addiction. The "Best Life Anti-Drug Programme" works towards anti-drug education in the community, treatment and rehabilitation services for the addicts. Dr. Griffiths Edwards, professor of psychiatry at the University of London and editor of the international journal *Addiction* told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "research has shown that a strongly held shared religious belief in the community, be it Muslim, Christian or Jewish, provides some barrier against drug abuse. It doesn't provide

a guarantee, however, when faced with rapid socioeconomic change, enormous increase in the size of cities and a breakdown in traditional family structures." Edwards added that the lesser susceptibility to drug abuse in religious communities must not be mistaken with the effects of religious fundamentalism upon the individual in the community which may force him/her to resort to drug abuse.

What was striking about the conference was that speakers were not talking so much about drug ad-

For a better life

THERE was a substantial and diverse menu of drug therapy on offer at the conference as medical staff, social workers and psychologists presented different treatment and rehabilitation programmes.

Dr Helene Lind, a Swedish psychiatrist currently based in Cairo, presented Egypt's only rehabilitation programme which involves long-term residential care in a segregated community. The programme, initiated by the Coptic Orthodox Church, was set up at the end of 1992. Drug addicts who have just completed their treatment can live in a separate and monitored drug-free community set up in the middle of the desert at Wadi El-Natrun. Lind admitted that it had to undergo substantial cultural adjustments to comply with Egyptian values. At the residential rehabilitation community, each male addict is given a chance to work, to learn some self-help skills. A social worker is assigned to counsel him and he is invited to attend group meetings which are held fortnightly. The duration of his stay is usually up to 18 months after which he is slowly integrated back into the community.

Dr Rafeek Hosni, Professor of Psychiatry at Liverpool University talked to *Al-Ahram Weekly* about the radical *Mersey anti-drug programme* which provides condoms and clean syringes to susceptible drug users and a restricted amount of drugs for chronic drug abusers. "For a programme such as this to work in Egypt, there must be a change of attitude. So far, systems around the world have a punitive view towards drug addicts. This criminalisation of the individual must change," said Hosni. He believed that "it may be modified to suit the cultural values of a country" and added that "the big advantage is that you do not marginalise drug addicts, you bring them back into the community."



Illustration: Negi Kamel

Okasha insisted that the specific motives behind secondary school and college drug abuse are beyond the common myths often regurgitated. He noted that 7.15 per cent of female university students take drugs as opposed to 22.8 per cent of male university students. Yet females almost catch up with the males in the use of tranquilizers, 5.01 and 5.79 respectively. The rate for use of stimulants is also high amongst females compared to males. This, however, is due to the fact that the primary reason for female university students' abuse of such drugs is to overcome exhaustion, and cope with psycho-social problems, often associated with being at university. Physical exhaustion is also the prime reason why the majority of students take narcotics.

Most expensive city

IN A RECENT survey carried out by Employment Conditions Abroad Ltd, Tokyo was reported as the most expensive city for businessmen. Moscow and Paris are the second and third most costly cities.

The survey explained that the daily expenses in Tokyo may reach \$493.85 while in Moscow it is \$478.90 and \$420.87 in Paris.

In Europe Geneva and Copenhagen are the least expensive cities, while Hong Kong is the most expensive one in Asia. The survey mentioned Lagos and Nairobi as the most expensive cities in Africa.

MONEY & BUSINESS

NBE in the first half of 1995/96: Outstanding performance — Distinguished services

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt's (NBE) outstanding performance during the first half of 1995/96 has resulted in market achievements mainly manifested in the following figures as of 31 December 1995.

- Total footings rose to LE50.8bn with an increase of 12.8 per cent on the previous year.
- Deposits grew by 8.8 per cent to amount to LE37bn.
- Loans and investments recorded a 19.9 per cent increase to total LE31.4bn.
- Profit (before deducting provisions and taxes) increased to LE625mn with an increase of 16 per cent over the previous year.
- These outstanding achievements are mainly attributed to the bank's pioneering role in developing its services as shown:
- Financing and participating in capital intensive infrastructure projects.
- Expanding the scope of consumer credit via a wider issue of plastic money. Holders of the NBE Visa Card currently enjoy an additional advantage represented in a free insurance policy to safeguard the family and its place of residence. This new advantage is rendered by the bank in cooperation with El-Ahlia Insurance Co.
- Leading the drive towards banks' participation via establishing El-Ahly Co. for real estate development and the Egyptian Co. for Tourist Resorts which aims at developing Sahl Hashish on the red Sea coast with an issued capital of LE350mn and an authorised capital of LE700mn. This is besides participating in the project for developing Riviera Centre in Taba with a capital of LE100mn as well as the Montazah Co. for Water Desalination in Sinai.
- Adopting a new philosophy geared towards stimulating private enterprises to break through new fields. This goal is sought through participating in private projects and offering part of their share for public subscription.
- Supporting Egyptian exporters via trade finance services besides promoting their products abroad, and extending buyer credit. Moreover, the bank extends innovative services which hedge its customers against interest and exchange rate fluctuations. In addition, NBE gathers the relevant information about importers of Egyptian goods and invite Egyptian exporters to the local and international exhibitions.
- In cooperation with the Ministry of Supply and the Social Fund for Development, NBE has embarked upon expanding the project of rais-

ing marketing outlets for young graduates. Furthermore, the bank has signed several contracts with the Social Fund for Development to finance the establishment of new small-scale projects. In addition, the bank has participated in the United Producers Co. which aims at mitigating the unemployment problem via employing graduates in its distribution outlets.

The bank is also envisaged to participate in a huge handicraft project that would serve the same purpose.

In line with its philosophy geared towards penetrating the field of technology and squaring with the latest international developments, NBE has participated in the Nile Sat project whose investment cost totals US\$210mn. Moreover, the bank participated in the Egyptian Banks Co. for Technological Advancement, which specialises in the technological applications related to banking transactions, such as electronic funds transfer, cheque clearing, ATMs and POS, besides procuring credit information. Besides, the bank has also co-established the National Telecommunications Co. with the purpose of investing in telecommunication and information systems.

Simultaneously, the bank plays a key role in activating the capital market via extending margin finance and soft loans against securities, managing its portfolio, and establishing mutual funds. Furthermore, the bank has introduced sub-custodian services for correspondent banks so as to give their customers access to the Egyptian Stock Exchange. By virtue of sub-custodian agreements, the bank would take all the procedures deemed necessary for transferring the amounts thereof to the customers' accounts. In addition, the bank provides its customers with all financial consultations as well as in-depth reports on the stock exchange. NBE has further attempted to activate the stock exchange through the creation of companies operating in the fields of brokerage, marketing, covering subscriptions, forming and managing portfolios, venture capital and managing mutual funds.

— expanding the scope of private banking services.

— Increasing the finance extended to shipping projects, sea and air transport, building toll ways and airports such as Gaza International Airport.

— Establishing the first real estate market in Egypt.

US companies at Cairo Fair

AMONG THE participants in the Cairo International Fair are 60 US companies operating in various fields. Some of their wares on display include automobile batteries, televisions, solar-powered air conditioners and construction equipment.

Some of the displays on hand at this year's fair reflect a high level of creativity and innovation in order to attract potential customers. One company, for example, demonstrated the practicability of its construction equipment by building a house on the fair grounds itself.

The Cairo International Fair is the largest one in which US companies take part.

Prime minister opens Kuwait pavilion

PRIME MINISTER Kamel El-Ganzouri opened the Kuwait pavilion at the Cairo International Fair, which began last Saturday.



Accompanying the prime minister was Safwat El-Sherif, minister of information, Ahmed Guewili, minister of trade and home supply and Talat Hamad, the cabinet affairs minister. Kuwaiti attendees included dignitaries such as Kuwaiti Trade Minister Hilal Al-Metari, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Egypt Faisal Al-Khaled, manager of the Kuwait Press Centre, Sakr Al-Baljan, and head of the Kuwait pavilion, Abdallah El-Ofan.

About 31 Kuwaiti companies are participating in the fair. This reflects Kuwait's interest in promoting trade with Egypt, El-Ofan said.

Means of enhancing relations between the two countries were furthered when a high-level delegation from El-Nasr Co. visited Kuwait to promote commercial exchange between Egypt and Kuwait. The delegation brought samples of Egyptian products that are expected to find a market in Kuwait. The delegation will also review with Kuwait about attempts to open trade agencies in Kuwait.



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Two archaeological sites will open soon at Abu Sir and Dahshur. Nevine El-Aref takes the road south of the Giza Plateau

Abu Sir and Dahshur are being prepared for official opening in June. These two sites, which sit between the famous Pyramids of Giza and the no-less-frequented monuments of Saqqara, will now extend the tourist attractions of the entire Giza plateau, which actually spreads from north Giza to Meidum in the south.

Until now, Abu Sir has been difficult to access from the main road and Dahshur has been totally off-limits to tourists, nestled as it is in a military zone south of Saqqara. The whole of the necropolis will be restored and all surrounding roads are expected to be paved, said Zahi Hawass, general director of the Giza plateau.

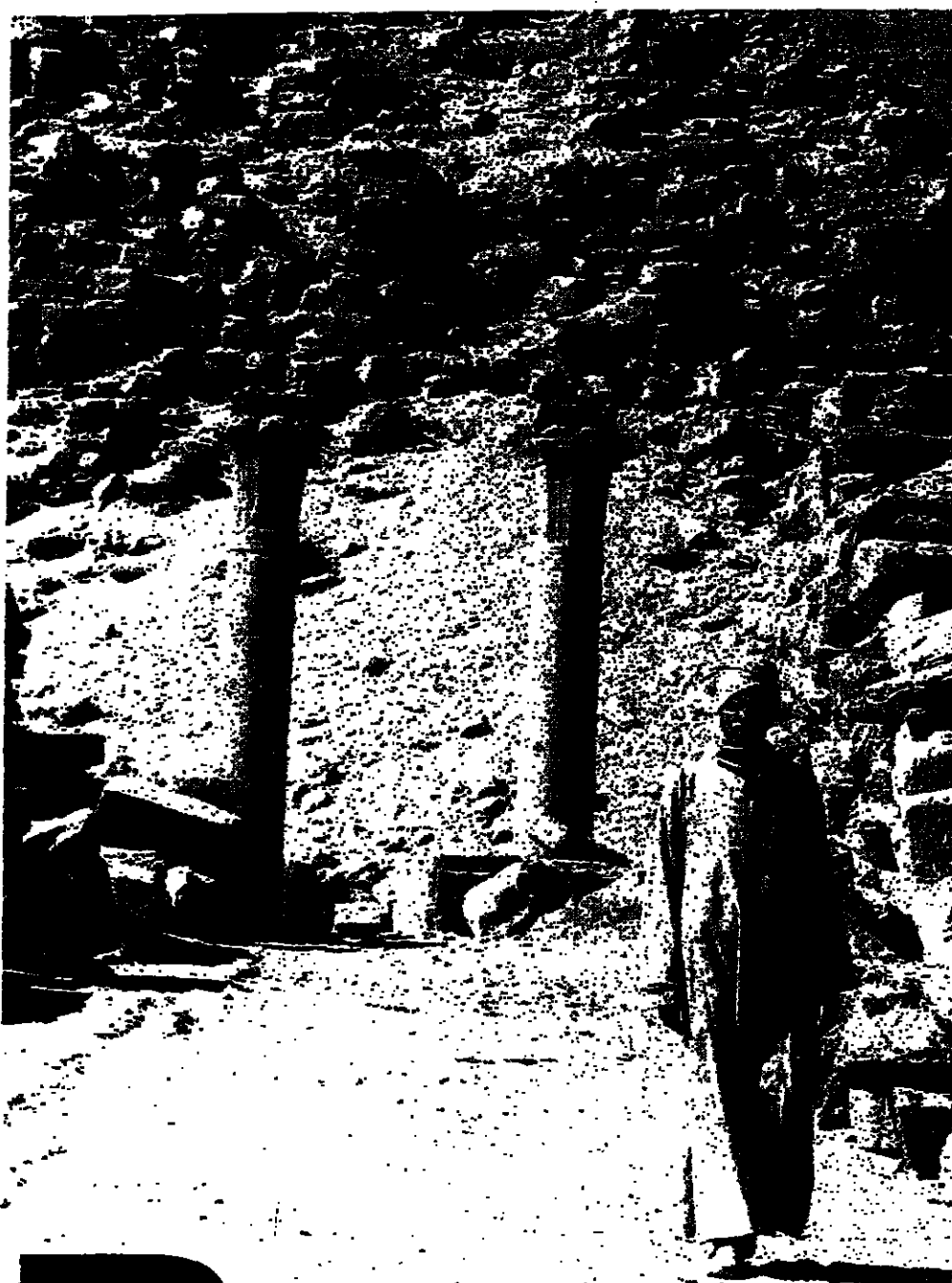
In store for summer visitors of Abu Sir, are the pyramids that the fifth dynasty kings built for themselves and the Sun Temples they built in honour of their "father", the sun-god. The Abu Sir Archives — a great batch of papyrus — was also found there, as were the ruins of a causeway featuring unusual reliefs of Bedouin tribes, and the representation of a ceremonial ritual where an ancient Egyptian places the cap-stone on a pyramid.

Restoration of the Tomb of Ptahshepses was initiated three years ago by the Czech Archaeological Institute and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), said Ezzat El-Ghundi, the inspector at Abu Sir. The Czechs provided chemicals and expertise, the Egyptians, building material and labour.

The tomb — the largest non-royal *mastaba* in Egypt — is a remarkable hybrid structure that is both private tomb and royal mortuary temple. Two huge limestone columns located at the tomb's entrance have been reconstructed to their original six-metre height and a new wooden roof has been constructed to cover the whole structure. Minor restoration work has also been done in the tomb's sarcophagus chamber — especially to the reliefs decorating the walls.

Professor Ladislav Bares of the Czech Republic describes the tomb as a "vast architectural complex which reveals conflict within the ruling dynasty and the deepening economic crisis in Egypt in the fifth dynasty."

As restoration work often leads to new finds, Abu Sir has been no exception: fragments of reliefs, sculptures, cult objects, tools and earthenware, were recently uncovered and are now stored at the Egyptian Museum.



The Pyramid of Sahure at Abu Sir (left), and other sites on the necropolis including the "Red Pyramid" at Dahshur (top), horse-riders and guest-house at Abu Sir, and the last of the dirt-tracks

Roads rarely travelled

The Pyramid of Sahure at Abu Sir is also the object of restorers' attention. "Fallen limestone blocks of the funerary temple have been returned to their original positions and two columns of the colonnaded courtyard have been restored as an example of the architecture of the period," said El-Ghundi, adding that restoration work continues at the pyramid's causeway.

Development projects in Dahshur, about 20km south of Abu Sir, are also progressing. Nourredin Abdel-Samad, inspector at Dahshur, described the first phase as making accessible, by June, the two pyramids of Senefru: the "northern" or "red" pyramid, and the so-called "bent" pyramid. Structurally,

this pair provides the historical link — the intermediate stage — between the Step Pyramid at Saqqara and the Great Pyramids of Giza.

The second phase involves the pyramid complexes of the Middle Kingdom: the pyramids of Amenemhat II, Senusert-III and those of their queens and princesses, constructed centuries later. These are brick constructions that were originally cased in limestone. When the limestone was usurped, as quarry, the structures largely fell to pieces. But they have yielded a rich reward to archaeologists, both materially — in the form of jewelry and pottery — and architecturally.

Dahshur, like Abu Sir, will be to upgrade the whole site with a parking area, a cafeteria, ticket kiosk, toilets and other services for visitors. A new lighting system will be installed at the foot of monuments at both sites, said Abdel-Samad. According to Zahi Hawass, a small museum displaying blocks found in Abu Sir is also on the project list.

Creating an integrated tourist zone of the area from Giza to Dahshur will undoubtedly inspire more interest in pyramid construction and in the monuments of the "Great Pyramid Age". Roads permitting, the entire area can be viewed in one quick and convenient trip.

The scent of Sicily

Trekking through lava and feasting on pasta, Inji El-Kashef spends a day in Sicily — home to much more than the infamous mafia

I had been praying for good weather. After all, what would Sicily be if its green mountains weren't bathing in the sun? As the tour guide later explained, even the weather is *mafioso* in Sicily — completely uncontrollable.

The ferry left Malta at 7:30am. An hour and a half later my tour group reached Pozzallo where buses waited. The passengers checked in at the Italian customs office and the queue moved briskly, until my turn came.

There was a visa misunderstanding and I had to wait. After 40 minutes an officer announced that I could "proceed with my visit," in Italian, of course. "But if you do not leave Sicily tonight, no matter what the circumstances," he continued, "you will be considered *persona non grata* and will never be allowed on Italian territory again."

This seemed like a good enough reason to guard against an involuntary shortening of my trip by falling off the top of a mountain or perhaps breaking my neck on some Roman theatre steps. But the title of *persona non grata* was rather appealing, and becoming one, rather tempting.

I finally caught up with the rest of the group. The officer had informed the tour guide of my delay and had arranged for a car to deliver me to the bus. But it was too late to indulge in the Sicilian breakfast they had just been offered.

Off we went to Mount Etna, the largest active volcano in Europe — 3,345m high. Etna has erupted more than 100 times since 475 B.C. The

most violent eruption engulfed entire villages and chestnut and almond plantations under one million cubic meters of lava in 1956. The lava, which usually pours down the northern side of the mountain, changed its course that year and flowed down the southern flank, taking villagers by surprise and leaving them no time to flee. The sight of a house buried under a mass of black rock with only its roof in view was proof enough that our guide was telling the truth. What has made Mount Etna's eruptions so devastating is the complex formation of 250 subsidiary craters which spurt lava simultaneously.

Once at the top, we raced to Terrazza dell'Etna — the best and closest restaurant. Despite the intimidating length of the queue, I had no intention of missing out on the delicious Italian pasta. I had never paid 20,000 of any currency for a plate of lasagna and I felt rich, forking out those lire.

It was freezing at Etna and I thought I was hallucinating when I went to collect some lava and found the stones hot in my hand. Lava, it was later explained to me, takes dozens of years to cool down completely.

Back on the bus, we headed for Catania. As we descended Mount Etna we drove through an immense cloud. I felt that it would make navigating the narrow and sharply curving slopes virtually impossible. But I was wrong. The bus driver had little trouble manoeuvring. We, nevertheless, voiced a collective sigh of relief when we could see again.

Catania is a beautiful town at the base of the mountain. Its white houses with red brick roofs are built against a background of green hills. Pine and chestnut trees line the streets. Every now and then we spotted a sumptuous villa and were informed by the proud tour guide that it belonged to *mafioso* so-and-so.

Our next stop was Taormina, a coastal resort and international yachting centre. The town is perched on top of a hill where the vegetation varies from pine to palm trees. It overlooks a rocky bay, Giardini Naxos, which extends into a long sandy beach that bustled with people on the overcast day.

Taormina looks like the perfect location for a film set. Every house has its unique stamp of striking artistry and seems to have once sheltered a passionate lover, an artist, or a ruthless criminal. It feels and even smells of a long-gone era, of different people and another life. The town itself is a labyrinth to a tourist unacquainted with its infinite network of narrow alleys.

On the main road, dozens of souvenir shops exhibit Sicilian ware: pottery and ceramics represent local mythological figures that I also spotted painted on many balcony walls. *Pasta de alimonda*, wine, honey and *amarretto* are on sale in almost every shop.

The streets of Taormina abound with inviting sidewalk cafes, full of elderly gossiping Sicilian women. The *Falloma* cafe offered delicious *gelato* that I thoroughly enjoyed — until I saw a man lick at an enormous bright purple ice-cream



The mood of the alleyways

ball that made my subtle one seem tasteless. I would have stayed longer in Taormina, but I was no longer as giddy about becoming a *persona non grata* and hastened my departure.

We headed back to Pozzallo to catch the ferry. The bus was air-conditioned and all the windows were closed, but a powerful scent of candy and flowers infiltrated the vehicle — an invigorating perfume that engendered in me a sense of well-being. I thought my senses were playing tricks on me until I looked out of the window and saw vast orange, almond, lemon, olive and vine plantations. The mix of fragrances evoked images of a Roman paradise where the gods celebrate the season's harvest.



THIS decorative capital is one of the Coptic Museum's masterpieces. It has travelled the world for display in five exhibitions and is now back in Cairo, reports Nevine El-Aref.

Though it is one of many column capitals found in the ruins of the Saint Jeremiah Monastery in Saqqara, this is unique with its own decorative motif. At 33cm high, the capital features deeply-cut grapes and acanthus leaves — typical of the early Christian period. Saqqara lies in a limestone belt and the fine quality white stone lends itself to such decorative work. Traces of colour can be discerned, and the artefact was subject to minor restoration.

It is on display on the second floor of the museum, in room six, which is entirely devoted to objects retrieved from the area of the monastery, immediately south of Zoser's Step Pyramid complex. It last journeyed to Paris where it was exhibited at the Arab World Institute.

Latin focus

AN AMERICAN-Mexican delegation touring Egypt last week with Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Belagui and presented Nobel prize winner Naguib Mahfouz with a literary achievement award.

They discussed efforts the ministry is making to increase the flow of tourists from Latin America and means of increasing tourism from Mexico. The Los Angeles-based Egyptian tourist office is already targeting US citizens of Latin American origin on the US west coast.

AIESEC in Egypt

REPRESENTATIVES of the International Association for Students in Economics and Management (AIESEC) arrived in Cairo last week to attend Egypt's first Tourism Development Conference. Foreign delegates to the conference are expected to promote tourism to Egypt in their home countries. AIESEC is a non-profit, non-sectarian international organisation with over 100,000 student members worldwide, including 150 in Egypt. AIESEC's Egypt branch organised trips to the Giza Plateau, Alexandria, Luxor and Aswan, for the conference participants.

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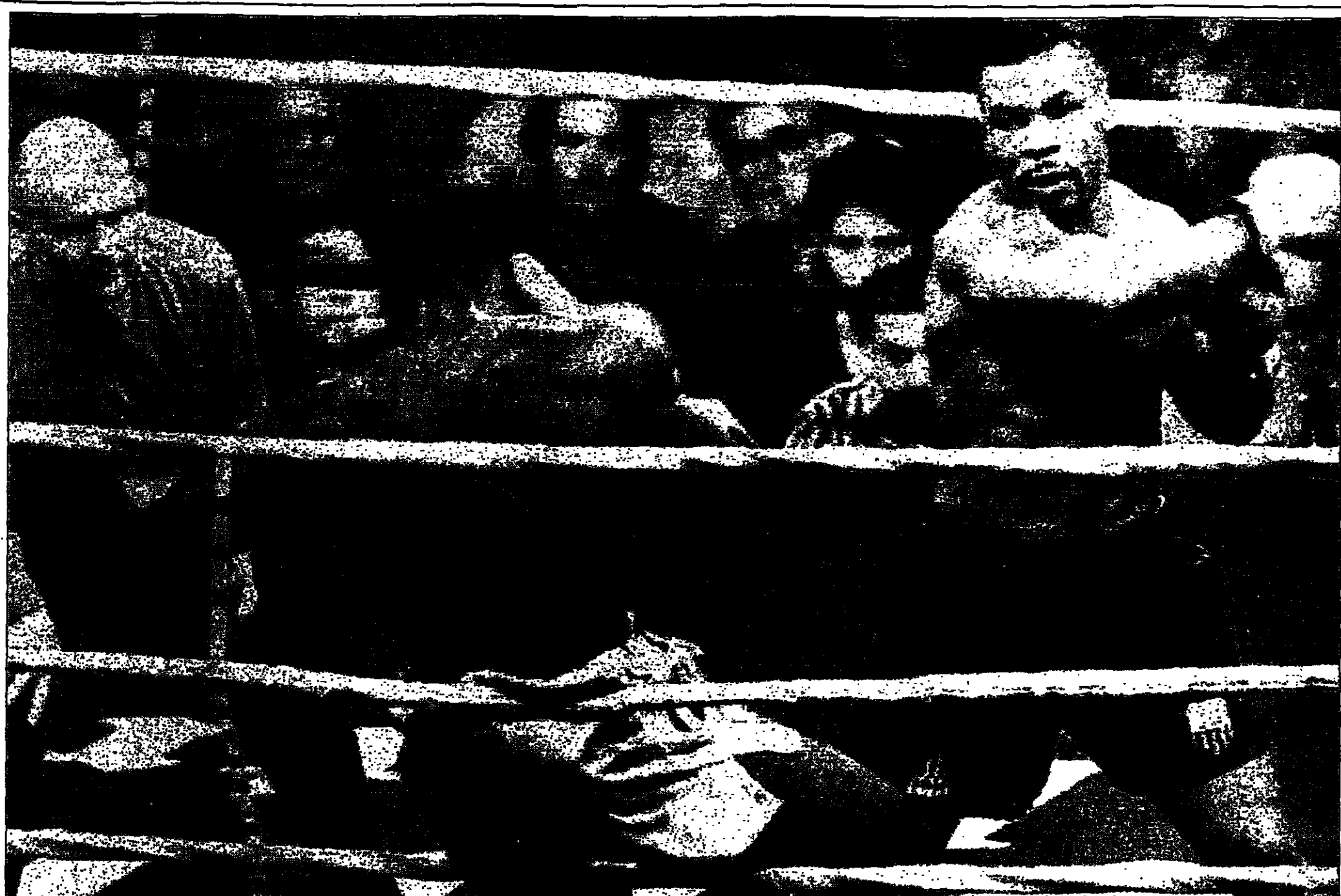


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Prison bars toughen "Iron" Mike

PRISON seems to have only honed "Iron" Mike Tyson's skill and strength — a fact verified by his reclaiming of the World Boxing Council (WBC) Heavy Weight crown in Las Vegas this week. Tyson drove his mammoth fist into British WBC Heavyweight champ Frank Bruno's face enough times that by the third round of a scheduled 12-round contest, Bruno passed out on the seconds.

In the second round, Bruno received a flurry of vicious blows by Tyson that had him reeling and his left eye bleeding. By the end of the

third round, Bruno was stumbling around, praying for the bell, when Tyson decided to ring his with a powerful left hook to the head. The 112kg Brit smacked against the ropes and the referee, who was obviously seeing the same stars that Bruno saw, dispensed with the mandatory ten-count and removed Bruno's mouthpiece.

"I just wanted to throw a bunch of punches," said the 100kg, 29-year-old Tyson. "I wanted to bring him down." Obviously, when you want something badly enough...

"I'm fine," said Bruno once he got to his feet. "I'm a little broken-hearted." This was Bruno's first title defense since he stole the crown on points from Oliver McCall last September.

The title fight was Tyson's third victory in the ring since being released from prison after serving three years for the rape of a beauty pageant contestant. Tyson has a professional record of 45-1. His only defeat came at the hands of James "Buster" Douglas, who knocked Tyson out in the 10th round of a title fight in Tokyo. (photo: AFP; feature AP)

Five times the fun

There's no need to climb the highest mountain or swim the roughest sea — modern pentathlons are now a gentleman's game blending savvy sophistication and physical fitness, writes **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab**

The 14th Egyptian International Modern Pentathlon Championship — a three-day, five-event competition, which includes pistol shooting, swimming, fencing, running and four rounds of show jumping (equestrian events), offered the gentleman athlete a chance at fun and frolicking under the sun while pitting his wits and sportsmanship against a bevy of other gents from around the world.

This year, the championship drew 37 contestants from 12 countries: France, Poland, Canada, Switzerland, South Africa, Portugal, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Finland, Austria, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. The teams were made up of three individuals, with host Egypt fielding three teams.

Although all the teams attending had winning on their mind, as with most competitions, there can be only one, with the French capturing the number one position by scoring 15,908 points. Poland came second with 15,812 and Egypt took third with 14,692 points.

But win, lose or draw the competition was heated, intense and, in some cases, comic. According to Major-General Reda Abdel-Wahab, this year's competition was the most successful to date. "We had to turn away six countries who wanted to enter because they missed the registration deadlines," he said. This, however, did not detract from the quality of the competition. Poland's senior pentathlete, Maciej Czerwinski, aged 34, stood above the rest. As a gold medalist in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and 6th place finalist in last year's World Championship, Czerwinski was operating from a position of strength by experience.

On the first day of competition, which included the shooting, swimming and fencing events, Czerwinski led the way in the shooting event with 1156 points. France's Olivier Ibez, 24, won the swimming competition with 1284 points and foiled the competition in the fencing showdown by securing 1093 points.

The second day of the championship was held in the swanky Gezira Club where the pentathletes donned the shorts for the cross-country event. France's Cedric Mulard, 26, pulled ahead of the pack and finished first with 1252 points.

The real excitement, however, took place on the two-day show-jumping competition. The individual equestrian victory went to Egypt's Walid Sayed, who



Ibez of France in the show jumping event

earned 1,100 points. Two other riders scored clear rounds, but Sayed had the fastest time. It was Egypt's Sameh Sobhi, however, who had the hardest time. In mid-competition, he was tossed from his horse, kicked by it, cried out in pain and garnered the sympathy of the other Egyptian pentathletes who ran en masse to help him and steady his steed. The horse, however, was having none of that, and put up a fair bit of fight. Encouraged by the stallion's rebelliousness, the other 12 horses began acting up throughout the competition, expressing their disapproval of the sport by kicking the riders and knocking over the jumps.

Modern pentathlons are, in general, three-day events with the scores calculated on a points system. Each event produces an individual champion, and the points are carried through to the next event to calculate an overall individual and team pentathlon champion.

The young enforcer

A little luck, a good deal of talent and a lot of hard work have helped push Egypt's professional referee, Gamal El-Ghandour, towards fame in the world of international refereeing. **Abeer Anwar** reviews his meteoric career, his outstanding success and his dreams

Gamal El-Ghandour is sitting on top of the world — the refereeing world, that is. At 38, the former Nasr City football player-turned-referee is one of the youngest international referees in the world.

But that's not from where he derives his claim to fame. As a professional referee, El-Ghandour has been calling the shots for almost 16 years, and the list of good calls to his credit is extensive and impressive. To date, he's umpired in three different Arab Club championships, the opening and closing matches in the 1995 African Juniors Cup in Nigeria, three matches in the 1995 World Juniors Cup in Qatar and three matches in last January's African Nations Cup. The latter included the semi-final match between Ghana and South Africa in which he was named by the Euro Sport television channel as one of the best referees in the competition and a main reason behind the success of this crucial match.

Impressive? Yes. Surprising? Not really. Since the tender age of 22, El-Ghandour has been more drawn to the more laid back world of officiating than to the star-studded world fame of the footballers.

Although he played for the Nasr City football team, El-Ghandour felt his true calling came from calling the shots in the match. At the time, when not on the field playing or training, he spent a good part of his free time seated in a cafe noted as a hang-out for referees and sports commentators. There, he came into contact with the likes of Mustafa Kamel, Ali Qandil and Mohamed Hosam — names which rolled off the tongues of any football enthusiast in the early 1980s.

Name recognition and contacts may be what it takes to get one's foot in the door, but they don't a dream make. They were, however, all El-Ghandour needed to get his first break. Overhearing a conversation about a competition for referees in 1980, he seized the opportunity, entered the competition and came out with flying colours, winning first place with a score of 99.9 per cent.

It was not all roses from that point on, however. "Young referees were not given the chance to judge a Super League game because the Arbitration Committee was afraid that we may be roughed up by the fans because of controversial calls," he recalled. "But Ali Qandil, the head of the referees committee at the time decided to give me a chance to prove my stuff." And prove he did. El-Ghandour did his rookie time as a linesman, but within eight years was elevated to the level of first degree referee. Two years later he was in charge of Super League matches.

At this point his career took off, with him being selected to referee key matches in several international and regional competitions. But of all these matches, the one that stands out in El-Ghandour's mind was the one between South Africa and Ghana in the 1996 African Nations Cup. "At first, I had mixed feelings about how well I could referee the match," he said. "I was happy to be chosen to referee such an important match, but I was a little intimidated by the fact that the South African team was playing on their home turf. I wasn't sure how the fans would react."

Moments like these, however, are when the best distinguish themselves from the rest by reaching deep within for that extra measure of confidence that allows the ordinary to be the extraordinary. "I finally managed to control my feelings and fo-



El-Ghandour in historical Zamalek vs Ahli match

cus on refereeing the match as objectively as I could — in much the same way that I refereed the Super League matches," said El-Ghandour.

He apparently did a good job, good enough to prompt President Hosni Mubarak to announce that from here on, crucial national matches would be refereed by Egyptians.

"I can't begin to express my happiness that at last Egyptian referees have gained the confidence and respect of all, including the president," said El-Ghandour. This move, according to El-Ghandour, was a long overdue and a necessary step. It was unreasonable, he said, to expect that FIFA would ask an Egyptian to referee a World Cup match, for example, if that measure of confidence in their abilities was not even evident among their own countrymen.

Mubarak's declaration, aside from elevating the status of Egyptian referees at home, was also a personal coup for El-Ghandour. Shortly after the announcement, he was chosen to referee an Ahli-Zamalek match in the Super League. The significance of this match lay in the fact that fans, capitalising on years-long animosity between the two teams, could become unruly, thereby requiring the services of a veteran referee to keep things in order.

"I felt that I was being put through a crucial test, the outcome of which would shape the future of Egyptian referees," he said. "I wanted to prove to everyone that Egyptians are as capable as foreigners to referee a match."

Again, he came out of the experience with flying colours. "The minute I got on the field, I forgot about the fans and focused all my attention on calling it like I saw it," recalled El-Ghandour. "By the end of the match, I realised that the fans were cheering for me. Usually in matches between these two teams, the fans hold the referee accountable. This time, that was not the case."

With a list of successes well placed under his belt, there is nowhere to go but up for El-Ghandour. He has been nominated by FIFA to referee in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. His main aim, however, is to referee in the 1998 World Cup in France. According to Farah Edo, the president of the African Arbitration Committee, this may not be such a distant dream. "Because of his talent and his physical fitness, he is the leading contender for the position."

Edited by Inas Mazhar



Squash it

BARRADA won the French Open last Monday. Ahmed Barada, 19, earned a sweeping victory 3-0 over Nicholas Taylor of Britain after an 80 minute match 9-5 9-7 9-3.

Barrada attributed his victory to his sponsor, businessman Ibrahim Kamel and Abbas Kaoud his coach. He also dedicated his victory to the head of Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Abdel-Moneim Emara. The French press praised Barada's powerful drop and aggressive straight shots.

Football fever

EGYPT'S national football team is currently participating in the Four Nations Emirates International Soccer Cup. The tournament, running from 19-25 March, includes teams from Korea, Morocco, the UAE and Egypt. The first match of the cup was on Tuesday between the UAE and Korea. Defending champion Egypt will face off against the UAE tomorrow. The Egyptians will play their last match on Monday against Korea. The final match of the cup will be on Tuesday between the UAE and Morocco.

Femme football

NO LONGER just a man's sport, the first official international meeting for women's football in Egypt will be held in Hurgada next Tuesday when the Egyptian women's football team plays their Swiss counterparts in a game scheduled to be played in El-Baros village. The match will be supervised by Sahar El-Hawari, a businesswoman who is also in charge of women's football in Egypt. It will be co-supervised by Kamel Abu Ali, former vice president of Switzerland's famous Neuchatel Club.

Handy handball

THE AHLI handball team defeated defending champions Zamalek 24-22 in a very quick, enthusiastic, and thrilling game to win the National Cup. To determine the champion, a tournament of four teams was held in Ismailia, where Ahli, Zamalek, Olympic and Alexandria's Sporting took part in the three-day competition for the cup. Ahli won the cup after winning its three matches. Zamalek finished second, Olympic was third and Sporting fourth. Ahli celebrated their victory with their fans who followed the team to Ismailia.

Billiards bonanza

THE FIRST Snooker World Cup Middle East qualification rounds will take place in Egypt on 29-30 March. Teams of three players each from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Egypt will qualify in a round robin system at the Ramses Hilton Billiard Hall.

The winning team will participate in the finals of the first Snooker World Cup for amateurs and professionals slated for Bangkok, Thailand, 29 October to 3 November.

Olympics countdown

Knock out news

TWO Egyptian boxers have qualified for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. Amr Mustafa (91 kg division) and Ahmed Said (over-91kg) secured their slots in the Olympics by winning in the African Boxing Championship which was held in Tunisia this month. Mustafa defeated Uganda's Charles Kizza while Said out-punched Butsim Ubykanin of South Africa.

A matter of loyalty

KENYA'S National Olympic Committee has decided that reigning 800-metre world champion Wilson Kipketer must compete for his native Kenya and not for Denmark, his adopted home, in the Atlanta Olympics.

Kipketer, 23, has repeatedly said that he wants to represent Denmark, even though he is not currently a Danish citizen. And while the rules of the Olympics require competitors to be citizens of the country they represent, the International Olympic Committee said that Kipketer could qualify for the summer games if the Danish parliament grants him early citizenship. Kipketer has already won a gold medal for Denmark at the last World Athletics Championship.

Action and words

MARTIAL artist, body builder, actor and renaissance man Dolf Lundgren, Stallone's co-star in the movie Rocky IV, has just been cast for a new off-screen role, den mother to a team of US Olympic athletes.

Lundgren, 37, who has starred in a bevy of action movies, has been selected to watch over the US's modern pentathlon team in the Atlanta Games. His new role will entail that he throws around his weight to make sure the athletes eat right, get to bed on time, catch their bus to go to practice — all in the name of winning the gold.

Perhaps might makes right after all.

Run run run

STILL focused on quality, Japan has put forth one of their strongest women's marathon teams ever in an effort to win the gold in the Olympics.

The team, led by Barcelona Games silver medalist Yuko Arimori, also includes 1993 World Champion Junko Asari, 26, and Izumi Maki, 27, who holds the world record for the 20,000 metre run. Maki also won her first attempt at an international marathon in Osaka two weeks ago.

(Compiled by Eric Asomugha)

Saad Labib: A penchant for perfection

Disappearing borders? He's not worried. He knows where north is. Borders are there to be crossed

"I don't come from any village, like most people do," he says, his half-closed eyes sparkling as he chuckles. "I feel a certain envy when my friends and acquaintances speak of where they come from. I'm purely Cairene."

Saad Labib was born in 1921, the eldest of nine siblings. His father had little time to devote to his many children, while his mother "wanted me to be good without really articulating the matter any further." Shubra, Labib's birthplace and site of the family home, was a pleasant middle-class suburb in the early twenties, with wide tree-lined avenues where strollers spent their afternoons.

He grew up among friends who enjoyed books and devoured them voraciously.

"Culture and cultural activities were very much part of our lives, but of course that doesn't mean we didn't get up to mischief now and then."

He learned to play the violin, but his family forced him to give it up and concentrate on his studies.

"I became a listener rather than a performer," he says, a note of regret colouring his voice, "and later on it was Hussein Fawzi (the late musicologist) who expanded my horizons to include Western classical music."

Graduating from the Faculty of Law in 1941, Saad worked as a government lawyer with the Ministry of Interior.

"If I have any regrets, it would be that I worked as a lawyer for a couple of years instead of starting a career in journalism earlier than I did."

An avid writer since his early teens, after graduating, Saad became a regular contributor to various papers.

Al-Balagh, one of the publications to which he frequently sent his articles, ran into censorship problems, resulting in the cancellation of the lead article. Abdel-Qader Hamza, the owner, happened to have seen Labib's article and ran it instead.

Labib, with no practical experience in journalism to speak of, thus found himself on the front page by sheer chance.

Mohamed Mandour, editor of *Al-Wafd*, asked him to join as a full-time journalist. "Dr. Mandour was a strong influence in my life," says Labib; "he really taught me from scratch how to become a journalist."

This was the opportunity that released Labib from his fledgling career as a lawyer. "I never looked back, and that was over half a century ago."

Listening to Saad Labib, one can feel how intensely he has lived the past fifty years. His ideas and opinions are unequivocally formulated and flow unhesitatingly forth in logical order. Maybe the legal training of the early years? Or merely the journalist's bread and butter?

The early years were gruelling but fascinating. "I thought that since an article I had written had been published as a lead, I knew all there was to know about journalism... well, please put that down to foolish youth."

Mandour took Saad Labib through all the stages of journalism, from copy boy to fledgling reporter, from layout to print shop, from translation to writing.

"After this course, I was told that maybe now I could one day become a journalist. It taught me one thing: that you can never grasp the total picture before its parts have become second nature."

By 1945, Saad Labib was a cub reporter with a keen sense of news and a journalist's inquisitive

and forever questioning nature.

Then Abdel-Hamid El-Hadidi, who at the time was head of the radio news section, asked Saad to join the service. Labib agreed, on condition that he continue working as a full-time journalist as well.

"We worked my shifts around my newspaper schedule, and for a while this worked well, but eventually I had to choose one. I did. Radio news."

In 1955 Labib went to London for a six-week training course at the BBC, an event that further broadened his media horizons and sharpened his penchant for perfection in whatever he did.

"In 1957, one of my greatest dreams came true," Labib was asked to set up a cultural programme, the only one on the air.

"The European programme existed, but for a very special audience."

This was equivalent to letting a little boy loose in a candy shop.

"It was the happiest time of my entire career. I had carte blanche to set up a channel with very lofty cultural aims and standards, and I was given all the facilities: what more could I wish for?"

Among the most popular features were the weekly talks given by Taha Hussein, Abbas El-Aqqad, Soheir El-Qalansawi and other eminent personalities.

"Here, for the first time," he says, "were leading cultural lights directly addressing a mass audience, and allowing the common man in the street to absorb their thoughts."

Very much a behind-the-scenes person, Labib was seldom heard or seen on radio or television.

"It was in 1950, and while attending a trade fair, that by default I was asked to handle the microphone and do a live broadcast. Well, it appears I did quite well and Dr. Ali El-Rai, who was chief announcer at the time, asked me to join the team."

Labib did so, but only for a while. He was more interested, ultimately, in writing than in reading.

The cultural programme was the ideal vehicle. Later, with Fahmy Omar, he produced a radio magazine which quickly became immensely popular, an ideal combination of talents placing the written word in the service of audio broadcasting.

The cultural programme was so successful that Labib was put in charge of entertainment programmes, and it was during his tenure that some of the most long-running radio programmes were set up. But the wheels of technology were propelling the media onto a radically different course. Television now loomed on the horizon.

"You have no idea how sorry I was to leave my cultural channel and attend a training course at the BBC to study TV," he says with genuine sorrow — almost the despair of someone parting forever from a dearly beloved friend.

The idea of introducing TV was mooted in 1959, and the service was to be inaugurated just over a year later, in 1960. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive! But to be young was very heaven!"

Abdel-Hamid Younes headed the task force that included Tomadur Tawfiq, Abbas Ahmed, Hemmat Mustafa, Salah Zaki and Saad Labib.



Photo: Sherif Sorok

"We were working 20 to 24 hours a day as a matter of course, seven days a week. We had only one camera to train with and absolutely no idea of how to use it."

The team trained in one of the halls in Abdin Palace, converted into a studio of sorts.

"We had to learn everything, but everything, from scratch," chuckles Labib. "Make-up, lighting, set construction, camera directions, all the elements that constitute TV."

To add to the confusion, the instructors themselves had been trained in America, Britain, Italy, France and Germany. "This led to great difficulties in formulating a common jargon."

Two months before the inauguration, sleep was no longer on the agenda.

"On the big day, 20 July 1960, we were handed over the studio after its completion, just two hours before air-time. Heroes were born from within the engineering team!" You can almost taste the excitement as Labib leans forward, fists clenched.

"The programme was to begin with a recitation from the Qur'an, followed by a live broadcast of a speech by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the news, then an entertainment programme with songs and dances."

Saad continues: "We were not even sure that any signal would come through. We held our breath, the countdown began, tension rose to unbelievable levels; the red camera light was on... and — there was Nasser, loud and clear! The opening lines of the speech were lost amidst the hiss of air being expelled from bursting lungs."

Thus was TV born — amidst tension, relief, and a few bureaucratic snarl-ups, especially in the early days.

"In drama programmes, we would need, say, a donkey and cart for the story. Fine, but what budget item provides for this item, our accountant would wonder."

The rules and regulations were made up as they went along.

"We were really lucky. TV was born at a time of massive socioeconomic and political change. We were now part of the UAR, with Syria as our partner, new socialist laws were coming into being, all this gave the new medium top priority and we got

what we needed without hesitation, whether it was a new studio or a budget for a donkey and cart."

Saad Labib became secretary-general of programming, and was made responsible for all aspects of the new service.

The contribution to cultural life was very significant. The TV founded its own drama, dance and folklore troupes, for example by buying the Reda Folk Troupe, and this gave a tremendous boost to the dramatic and performing arts."

From day one educational programmes were introduced and a conscious effort was made to bring culture and learning into the home.

By 1965, Labib was the top man in TV. He made it a policy to support programmes with a cultural twist or a useful social message which also enjoyed mass popularity. The long-running serial *Al-Qahira wal-Nas* ("Cairo and People"), the breeding ground for some of Egypt's media stars, is perhaps the best example of the programmes he encouraged.

In 1971 Saad left TV — a more or less direct result of the events that led to the so-called "corrective revolution" of 15 May that year.

He sued the government and was reinstated, but "never went back; I only insisted on establishing — which I did — that I had been fired unjustly — which I had been."

Since then, Labib has been sharing his experience and know-how throughout the Arab world, setting up a radio and TV training institute in Baghdad, working as a consultant to UNESCO, ALESCO (the Arab League equivalent), working at the League itself, occupying a position on the board of directors of the Egyptian Radio and TV Union and, currently, teaching mass media at the private university in Sixth of October City.

In over five decades he has seen and heard almost everything, and never hesitates to share his thoughts on a matter. The Arabic language — or, more specifically, the decline in the standard of spoken Arabic — is one pet gripe. "In the 30s and 40s, politicians spoke in fluent classical Arabic, and newspapers were written in classical Arabic. After all, we had the likes of Taha Hussein and El-Aqqad writing regularly. Arabic poetry was a regular feature in all daily or weekly publications. But today you just have to listen to some of our an-

nouncers speak to realise the drastic drop in linguistic standards." He also sees the Arabic curriculum as a major factor in students' dread of grammar and literature lessons. "There must be a total reform of the educational system, not just patching up here and there. The emphasis must be on education, not on learning. Education must motivate the younger generations to seek information, to seek knowledge, not to sit back and be spoon fed."

Nor does he feel we are equipped for the information era, now well into its first decade. "Information must be readily available, and, more importantly, we must be motivated to seek information. This motivation, I think we lack."

Labib is the product of an era in which education was paramount, and he reacts with outrage at the shrinking airtime allocated to programmes with a social message or edifying content. "We find today that the cultural programmes on TV are relegated to some obscure times where a minimal audience is watching."

But he is hardly a hard-liner. The cultural invasion does not worry Saad Labib. "It did at first, but then when I thought it out clearly there really is no danger. The enormous amount of programming on offer teaches the viewer to be selective. The fact that certain films are shown is not the danger that people make it out to be. Trashy programmes would not have an audience — his logic is straightforward and persuasive — if there were programmes worth watching. 'We must produce programmes that instill our values in young people. And this must be done in an attractive, convincing manner, not in a way that insults our intelligence, as is the case now.'"

He has adapted to new phenomena with the ease characteristic of his other transitions: from newspaper to radio, radio to TV. The global village is not a soundbite but a fact of life, here to stay, as everyday as his morning coffee. "We must handle the phenomenon of disappearing borders by keeping an open mind. When borders fall we must cross them, not set up new ones."

Profile by Mohamed Islam

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostri

Forget raindrops on roses or whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens; we may all have had a few favourite things as children, dear, but not Selina Khouri. Only one thing is precious to her, and that's her violin. Her first violin was actually a gift from her father, director of the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra

Samir Khouri, tells me that there's been no stopping her since. Now, at the tender age of seven, Selina will be the first child to ever perform with an orchestra in Egypt when she plays a concerto by Russian composer Peter Tchaikovsky alongside the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra, tomorrow and 29 March, in the small hall of the Opera House. Held with the aim of

simplifying classical music in an effort to make it more enjoyable for children, the concert will also include a performance of Beethoven's *Minuet* and Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

Students of the world unite, the cry rang. And they will. From 1 until 5 April AUC's Student Union will be hosting the first Cairo In-

ternational Conference for Student Leaders, when eager and ambitious student leaders from universities throughout Africa, the United States and the Middle East will get together to share their experiences and ideas, and learn more about each other and themselves through a number of lectures, workshops and presentations.

The conference's research committee head Amr El-Bendary, and steering committee head Doss Khedr graciously contacted me recently to ask if I could honour the conference by giving a lecture on my experiences in the field of journalism as part of a student media workshop. Alas, much as I would have liked to, it would have been to no avail — I was once young, and full of ideas and ambition, but life has taken its toll and left me somewhat disillusioned; so much so, that I feel it would be unfair to dampen their enthusiasm by telling them what *real* life is really all about.

Thai me up. Thai me down. And that is exactly what will be happening from 2 until 15 April at the Cairo Sheraton during its Thai Festival. I'll be getting up to practise a few dance moves with the Thai dancers as they write gracefully to traditional folk-music. And I'll be sitting down to indulge in delicious Thai cuisine, and hear the numbers being called out with the hope that I'm one

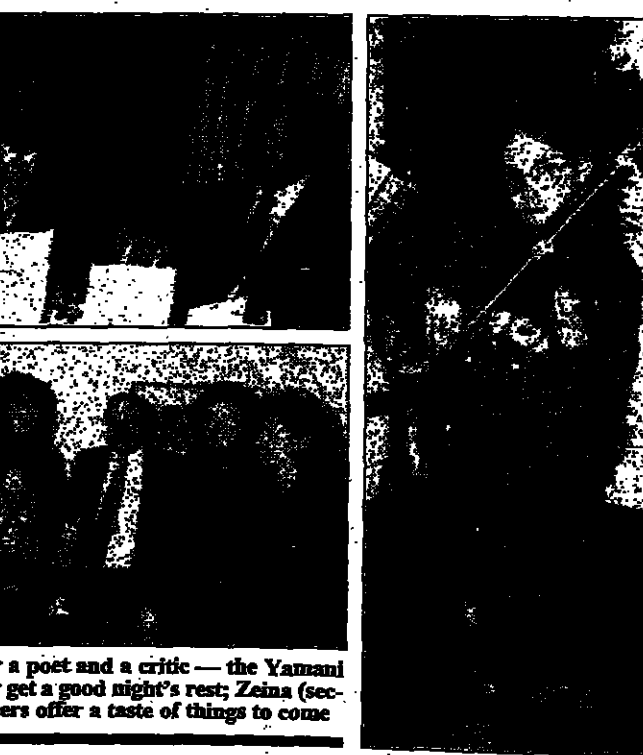
of the lucky raffle winners.

So there I was, dizzy with anticipation about the Thai festival, when it suddenly hit me that yesterday was the 40th anniversary of Tunisia's independence. I really can't understand how I could have forgotten. All the signs were there: I had recently bumped into my dear friend, Zeina Zela Al-Abedien, daughter of the Tunisian president, and her husband, businessman Selim Zarrouk at the Sheraton, and the day before yesterday I had gone to a wonderful reception attended by ambassadors, ministers and business men, and held at the fairground in Nasr City in preparation for the big day. The big day itself, celebrated at the Meridien Le Cairo, was, I hear, a rather spectacular event, with a photo exhibition, good food and a veritable mob of personalities

spanning the worlds of politics and art.

I didn't get a chance to attend the Yamani Cultural Association's second annual award-giving ceremony at the Sheraton recently, but I do think the event deserves recognition. The association was founded by Sandi Arabia's Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, and annually awards the Mohamed Hassan Fiqi Award to deserving poets and critics. Attending this year's event were ministers of culture Farouk Hosni, People's Assembly's head of foreign relations Mohamed Abdelhadi and Farouk Shousha, previous prize-winner and renowned Egyptian poet.

Lovestruck at AUC — and this time it's not the couples looking longingly into each other's eyes in discreet cor-



ners. This Lovestruck will only happen at the Wallace Theatre, for a limited period only — 3-6 April — and is the name of a play written by renowned writer Tawfiq El-Hakim, and now directed by AUC's Performing and Visual Arts Department's Associate professor Mahmoud El-Lozy.

Once again there's proof that all those who work for *Al-Ahram* have no choice but

to go up in the world. Senior reporter Inas Nour was recently informed that she had a one-month trip to Cologne in Germany to look forward to as head of the Arabic section of the Voice of Germany radio station. You've read the words and seen the face; now, dear readers, you can finally hear the voice. Oh! to be a rounded individual whose talents are being used to the fullest.

Inas Nour — this is your voice; (-) dining in style over a cultural event fit for a poet and a critic — the Yamani award-giving ceremony in full flow; Selina plays a pre-sleep classic to help her get a good night's rest; Zeina (see-ond left) waiting with anticipation for Tunisia's national day; while Thai dancers offer a taste of things to come

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